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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 236 WASHINGTON, MARCH 19, 2007 NUMBER 4,809

Health of Nations

How quickly times change. Just a few months ago, universal health care was a perfunctory item on the Democratic wish list, more wistful than realistic. But, thanks to John Edwards, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Wal-Mart—yes, Wal-Mart—a debate over universal health care is suddenly underway. And, to the shock of reformers, they find themselves mulling a previously unimaginable question: Can universal health care actually pass?

Unfortunately, this is where the discussion gets tricky. You can plausibly blame the failure of the last great reform effort, President Clinton's, on any number of factors. But a key impediment, in retrospect, was the widely held perception that the very idea of universal coverage was something foreign and scary. It's "socialism," the critics warned—unaware that the president who probably came closest to signing universal health care legislation was that notorious left-wing symp, Richard Nixon. Alas, history neither deterred the right-wing message machine nor dented the public's wariness of big government. The critics prevailed, and, today, we're still stuck with a dysfunctional health care system.

This season's reformers have already cobbled together genuinely innovative proposals. Whether you're talking about Edwards's plan for an individual mandate or Senator Ron Wyden's idea of junking the employer-based health care system altogether, there are now more than a smattering of serious ideas on the table. But all the novel policy in the world won't make universal coverage happen if the reformers can't shatter the old tropes that conservatives used to destroy the Clinton plan—and will undoubtedly reapply in the next battle. It's time to get rid of those. And the place to start is with taxes.

And, yes, there must be new taxes. In any decent universal health care system, public spending on health care will grow, as taxpayers pick up the cost of insuring the uninsured or—as in a single-payer system—the cost of insuring every single American. This gives the opponents of universal coverage an opportunity to pounce. New taxes mean new financial hardship, they say. And, really, don't you pay enough in taxes already?

But, if public spending on health care grows, then private spending on health care should shrink. Today, the average family insurance policy costs a staggering $11,000 per year. One reason: Private insurance *already* subsidizes the cost of treating the uninsured, since doctors and hospitals charge paying patients extra to make up for the money they lose on charity care. If government were to start insuring the uninsured directly, then people wouldn't have to pay quite so much for private coverage anymore. And, naturally, if government were to start insuring everybody, then people wouldn't have to pay for private insurance at all.

In other words, raising taxes to finance universal health care isn't tantamount to imposing a new financial burden. It's swapping one burden for another. And there is good reason to believe that, ultimately, the new burden will be smaller. Serious reform schemes have the potential to restrain costs substantially—whether by eliminating administrative waste, bargaining harder on prices, or reducing unproductive profiteering.

In one reform proposal, recently outlined in these pages by Ezekiel J. Emanuel and Victor R. Fuchs, the government could finance a universal voucher system with a value-added tax of 10 to 12 percent ("Vouchsafe," February 19). Yet, even accounting for those higher prices that tax would impose at the checkout counter, Fuchs, who is among the nation's most respected health care economists, predicted that typical Americans would end up better off financially. Among other things, he noted, wages would rise as employers stopped contributing toward employee benefits.

Calculations like these don't even begin to tally the added economic growth that reform might unleash. Among the many failures of our health care system is that it discourages people from changing jobs or starting out on their own by creating a fear of switching coverage or losing coverage altogether. Universal health care would potentially eliminate that damper on entrepreneurship. Indeed, this is the lesson of Scandinavia, where the high taxes that finance welfare states haven't deterred growth—in part, according to the experts, because a secure workforce is more willing to embrace a dynamic, ever-changing economy.

And, if invoking the example of Sweden (or, as is the case, Denmark) sounds suspiciously socialist, then Americans can

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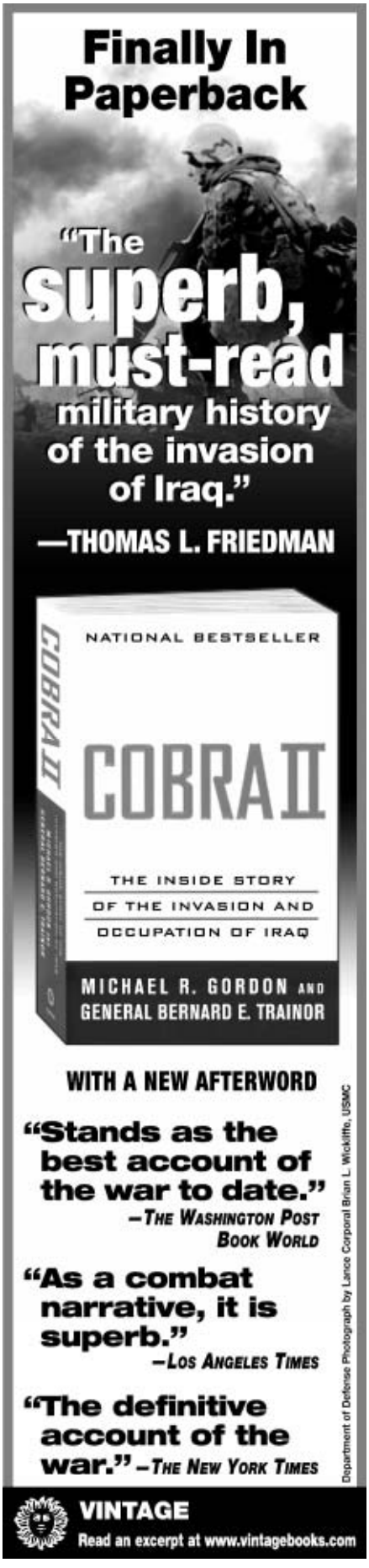
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comfort themselves with the fact that high taxes have been compatible with growth here, too. They need only harken back to the Clinton era—that is, before the Bush tax cuts slashed federal tax rates—when the economy enjoyed one of its strongest growth periods ever.

But it's not just financial benefits that universal health care would bring. It's also peace of mind—the security that comes with knowing your health insurance can never be taken away, no matter what happens to your job or what medical catastrophe befalls you. If you don't think that's worth an awful lot, ask somebody who has had to go without health insurance recently—a group that, according to some studies, accounts for nearly one-third of the entire U.S. population over the course of any two-year period.

Will Americans ever learn to live with higher taxes again? A few prominent politicians seem to think so. Arnold Schwarzenegger has justified the new "fees" to pay for his proposed California health plan by arguing that it's preferable to the "hidden tax" all residents now pay to cover the cost of care for the uninsured. It's a clever formulation that, appropriately, reminds voters of the money they could end up saving under his plan. More courageous, still, is John Edwards. When he unveiled his universal coverage scheme earlier this year, he came right out and acknowledged his plan to pay for it with taxes. The benefit more than outweighed the cost, he said without evasion, as if the concept were self-evident—and firmly in the mainstream of U.S. politics. That's certainly where it belongs.

The *New* New Republic

As you will have noticed by this point in the issue, we've done a bit of tinkering with TNR. These changes began with a question: What is paper good for? Or, to put it another way, how does the rush of new technology change the old ways of print publishing? Television, radio, and the Internet chew over Topic A at such a clip that any paper journal obviously faces a distinct comparative disadvantage when it comes to discussing the tumult of the week.

But, for all technology's advances—and we will exploit them fully at the soon-to-be-relaunched TNR ONLINE—we still believe, more than ever, in fact, in journalism produced on dead trees. Yes, it takes greater time and resources to put words on paper. But that, in turn, demands an investment in the craftsmanship of writing, reporting, and editing that can yield the defining, contextual pieces that we hope won't fade in relevance over a week, a month, or sometimes even years. So, as we increasingly have used our website to engage with the news cycle, we have found our print magazine organically acquiring a new identity—an identity based on longer, deeply reported profiles, essays, and investigative pieces that intend to shape opinions and events as much as they respond to them.

We began to take stock of this change and found ourselves asking: If we were no longer writing and editing a weekly magazine, then why publish a weekly magazine? With this issue, we've tried to embrace the logic of publishing in the Internet age. Our new, thicker magazine will appear twice a month, 24 times a year. We've improved our design, creating a magazine aesthetically worthy of the content within—better quality paper, original art, and photography. The design harkens back to the magazine's earliest incarnations. Hopefully, you'll find that the words embody the classic TNR spirit, too.

More details about our changes can be found at www.tnr.com/change, or, if you prefer human interaction, you can call 1-800-827-1289.

The Editors

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Bard College invites submissions for its annual Fiction Prize for young writers.

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Applications for the 2008 prize must be received by July 15, 2007. For further information about the Bard Fiction Prize, call 845-758-7087, send an e-mail to bfp@bard.edu, or visit www.bard.edu/bfp. Applicants may also request information by writing to the Bard Fiction Prize, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000.

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by Daniel Mark Cohen

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Flipping Off

The GOP presidential bloodbath begins.

JONATHAN CHAIT

In any tightly contested Republican presidential primary, the rival campaigns will inevitably get to smearing each other as secret homo-lovers, gun-haters, or abortion-coddlers. The convenient thing about this particular GOP primary is that they don't even have to lie. It's all true.

In the contest between Mitt Romney, Rudy Giuliani, and John McCain, flip-flopping is the coin of the realm. Romney was the chief victim at last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, with "Romney flip-flops" being handed out and Flip Romney the dolphin making an appearance. But the other two are just as vulnerable. Hardly a week goes by without a video surfacing of one of them saying something embarrassingly at odds with their current position. (An oppo dump on Giuliani is rumored to be forthcoming.) Watching the next year's worth of flip-flop attacks is going to be like watching hemophiliacs go at one another with chainsaws.

As aesthetically delightful as this spectacle may be, though, it's intellectually unsatisfying. It's perfectly sensible that Republicans (or anybody) would prefer a candidate who genuinely agrees with them. What's not sensible is how flip-flopping has become the metric by which we gauge their sincerity.

On the scoreboard of major flip-flops, Giuliani (partial-birth abortion and gun control) and Romney (abortion and gay rights) both lead with two. McCain trails with one (the Bush tax cuts, which he voted against but now vows to keep). I suppose if you count as a flip-flop McCain's embrace of onetime agent of intolerance Jerry Falwell, that would tie him up on the leader board. (Though, in McCain's defense, it's not literally a flip-flop, as he never specifically said he wouldn't hug Falwell.)

The Talmudic exercise of counting flip-flops, though, tells you little about a politician's ideological malleability. Anybody who spends enough time in elected politics will rack up a flip-flop or two. George W. Bush started out pro-choice and Dennis Kucinich pro-life. Both switched sides eventually, but nobody would accuse either of being an ideological weathervane. This is problem number one with the flip-flop obsession: Things that count as flip-flops often have no broader significance.

Problem number two is that changes that *do* have deep ideological significance often *don't* count as flip-flops. In 1992, Romney voted for Paul Tsongas in the Democratic primary. Two years later, Giuliani publicly endorsed Mario Cuomo. Romney isn't running on an anti-Tsongas platform today, but he's clearly running as the sort of man who would never vote for Tsongas, or any Democrat. Likewise Giuliani, whose conservative tribal appeal is based primarily on how much he hates liberals.

In McCain's case, his one or two flip-flops don't even begin to convey the enormity of his ideological metamorphosis. Over the last few years, Republicans and Democrats have both been downplaying his recent liberal history—Republicans, because they consider him a strong potential nominee whom they don't want to torpedo in the primaries; Democrats, because they consider him a strong potential nominee whom they *do* want to torpedo in the general election. As a result, nearly everybody has forgotten just how far left he moved a few years ago.

At the beginning of his first presidential campaign, McCain was a conservative in good standing, with the major exception being his support for campaign finance reform. But, as the campaign progressed, McCain began to apply the lessons of campaign finance reform to other issues. "I think the party to some degree has lost its way," he said in late 1999, "and I think this is because of the influence of big money."

After returning to the Senate, he embraced a broad progressive agenda. McCain voted against the major Bush tax cuts and denounced them as giveaways to the rich. He co-sponsored a patients' bill of rights, legislation to allow imported prescriptions, higher auto-emissions standards, stricter financial regulations, a measure forcing the United States to comply with the Kyoto treaty, and one to close the gun show loophole. On each of these issues, he was to the left of many Democrats.

In the summer of 2001, McCain met privately with Tom Daschle and other top Democrats to discuss the possibility of a party switch. In 2004, John Kerry tried to woo McCain as his vice presidential nominee. *The New York Times* reported that Kerry and McCain had seven conversations about the idea, which seems like six more than would have been needed if McCain had said, "No thanks, I'm a conservative Republican who firmly supports Bush."

Shortly thereafter, McCain decided to seek the 2008 GOP nomination. Soon he was seen hugging Bush, which began his return into the conservative fold. Where McCain used to tout his admiration for trust-busting progressive Teddy Roosevelt, today he takes counsel from supply-side guru Arthur Laffer. That a total philosophical inversion like this doesn't count as a "flip-flop" just demonstrates how little flip-flopping tells you about a candidate.

The deeper mistake is the belief that flip-flopping is a pure reflection of authenticity. The fallacy was perfectly expressed last year by *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, who wrote, "Some people (Bill Clinton comes to mind) have a knack for making easy compromises on the road to election, but McCain isn't one of them."

The truth is, politicians at the serious-presidential-contender level are *all* willing to compromise to achieve larger goals. Flip-flopping really reveals less about a candidate's character than about his circumstances. Romney and Giuliani both hail from very liberal places. Going from mayor of New York or governor of Massachusetts to GOP presidential nominee without some flip-flopping would be impossible.

McCain, on the other hand, comes from conservative Arizona. Why, then, has he flip-flopped so much? Because he can. Everybody "knows" McCain is authentic. McCain knows everybody knows that. ("I would argue that I have not changed any of my positions, and if I did really change my positions on issues, that I would lose what is probably one of the greatest attractions that people have for me, and that is as a person who stands up for what he believes in.")

Conversely, everybody "knows" Hillary Clinton is phony. Therefore, Clinton can't budge an inch on her Iraq vote, and McCain has a license for a total ideological makeover. Does that mean Clinton has more character than McCain? No, just less room to maneuver. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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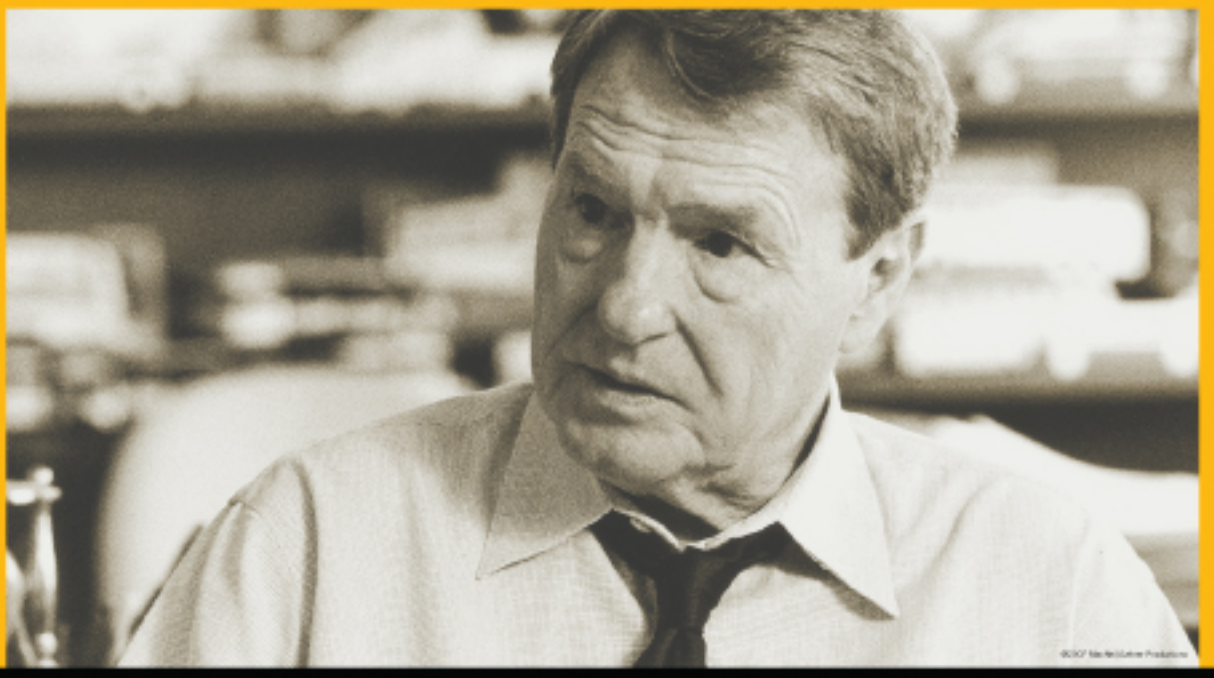

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Heart of Darkness

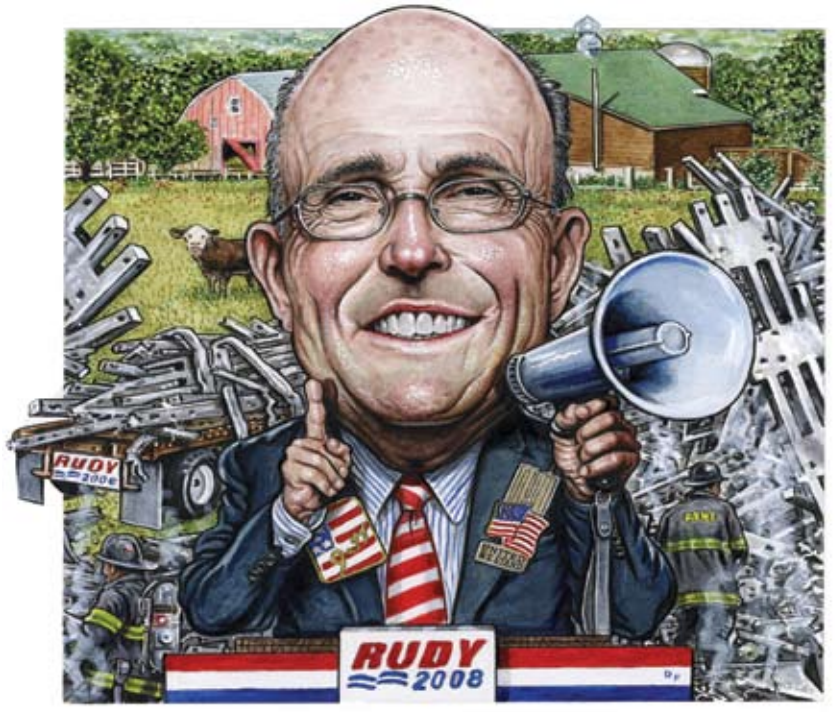
Dick Cheney's mind/body problem.

WHAT IS WRONG with Dick Cheney? Since the earliest days of his vice presidency, people have been asking this question. At first, it was mostly out of partisan pique; but, increasingly, it's in troubled tones, as one of the most powerful men on the planet grows ever more rigid, belligerent, and just plain odd in both his public utterances ("Go fuck yourself," Senator Leahy) and private actions (shoot a man in the face and not bother to call your boss 'til the next day: What's up with that?). In October 2005, longtime Bush-Cheney pal Brent Scowcroft fanned the Dick-has-changed flames when he told *The New Yorker*, "I consider Cheney a good friend—I've known him for thirty years. But Dick Cheney I don't know anymore." By the following February, a *Newsweek* profile noted that speculation as to the causes of the vice president's "darkening persona" had become a favorite Beltway parlor game. ("Has he been transformed, warped, perhaps corrupted—by stress, wealth, aging, illness, the real terrors of the world or possibly some inner goblins?") Fast-forward a year, and Cheney can hardly open his mouth without setting off a fresh wave of buzz about whether he has finally gone 'round the bend. As *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoagland recently asked, "Is the vice president losing his influence, or perhaps his mind?"

Much of the Cheney speculation focuses on September 11 and the nation's subsequent immersion in a shadowy new breed of war. Another popular theory holds that Cheney's time in the private sector—and the enormous wealth, power, and privacy to which he grew accustomed—spoiled him for a return to public service. Yet another posits that Cheney, recognizing this president's need for a strong father figure, has gotten carried away with his role as White House *pater familias*. But, alongside such talk of external stressors, the possibility is often floated that Cheney's transformation has a more physiological root—specifically, that the vice president's chronic heart problems are to blame. While this theory tends to be quickly dismissed as lacking concrete proof, it nonetheless resurfaces again and again, as if people are unable to dismiss the notion entirely.

Part of the problem may be that the science surrounding this issue remains, in many ways, as much of a puzzle as the vice president himself. Currently, there exists an impressive (and growing) pile of research indicating numerous ways in which a person's cardiovascular troubles—as well as the treatment he receives for them—may erode his mental acuity, especially as a body ages. But there is, as yet, little consensus about the exact hows, whys, and what-to-do-about-its involved. Even so, considering all that we know about the sorry state of Cheney's circulatory system—spotlighted most recently by the March 5 news that the v.p. is suffering from deep vein thrombosis, a potentially fatal blood clot in his left leg that will require months of treatment with blood thinners—it seems only prudent to bring the cocktail chatter into the open and examine some of the research linking heart health and cognitive function. Is there, in fact, any medical basis for the persistent speculation that—war, terrorism, and partisan politics notwithstanding—the trouble with Dick Cheney is, quite literally, a broken heart?

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



Rudy Giuliani takes his campaign to the heartland.

BANNERS BY CATHIE BLECK

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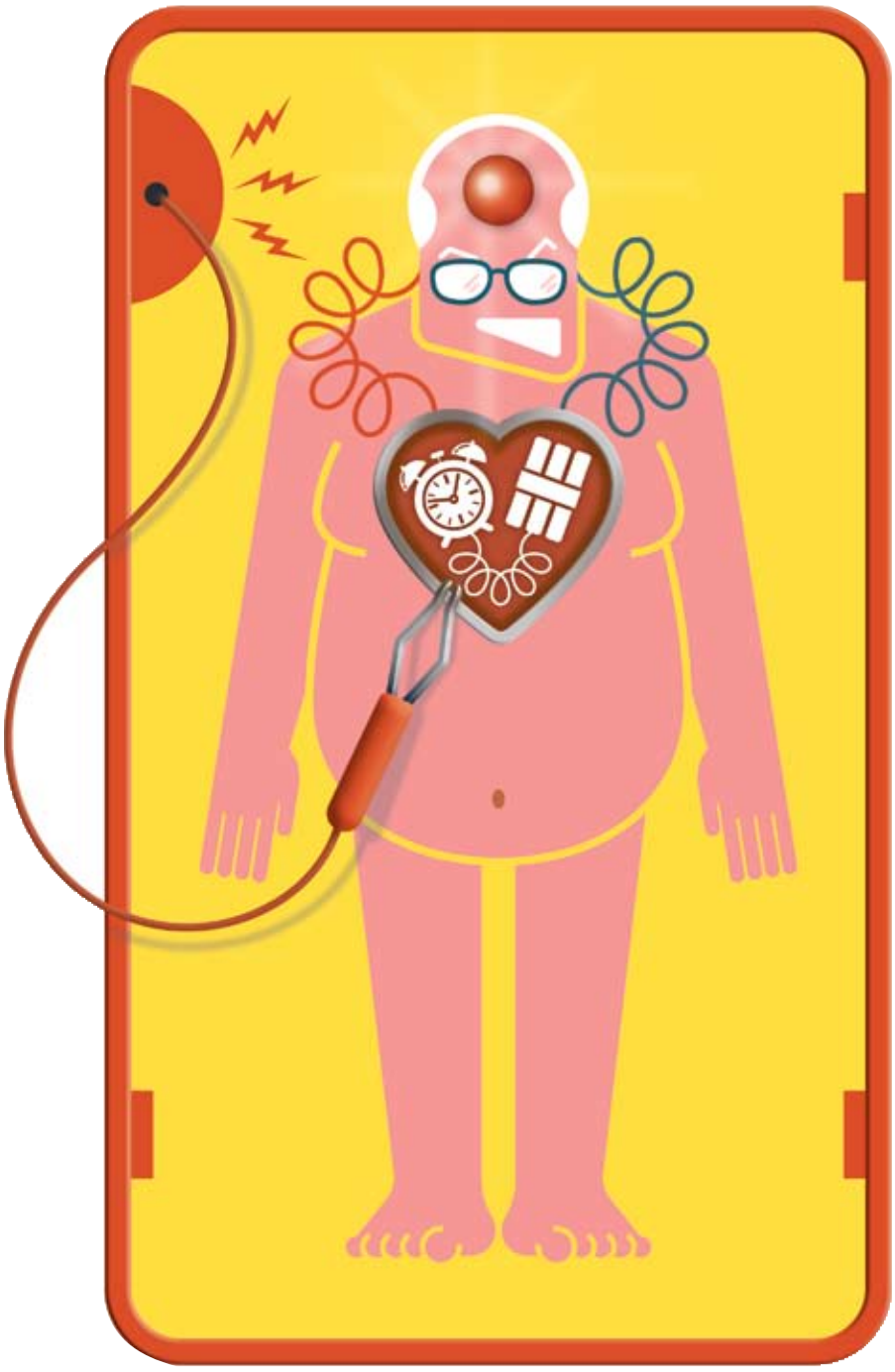
First, let us review what is publicly known (and reasonably suspected) about the vice president's defective ticker. Since 1978, Cheney has suffered four heart attacks (the first at the tender age of 37) and recurring abnormalities (such as an episode of angina in 2001), necessitating quadruple-bypass surgery (in June 1988), the placement of a coronary stent (November 2000), a repeat catheterization (March 2001), and the implantation of a cardioverter defibrillator, or high-tech pacemaker (June 2001). Around the time he acquired his defibrillator, Cheney's ejection fraction—a measure of how efficiently the heart is pumping blood—was reported to be around 40 percent, two-thirds the normal level. There is also evidence that the v.p. is suffering from peripheral artery disease (which would hardly be shocking, since atherosclerosis is rarely confined to one area). Notably, in September 2005, Cheney underwent a procedure on the backs of both knees to repair popliteal artery aneurysms, the most common type of peripheral artery aneurysm and a pretty good indicator that his vascular troubles are progressing. Reports of Cheney's feet swelling (a symptom of full-blown congestive heart failure) and his brief trip to the hospital in 2006 due to fluid in his lungs (also a sign of heart failure, though Cheney's office said his troubles stemmed from medication he was taking for a foot ailment) prompted a flurry of speculation that the vice president is in much graver shape than publicly acknowledged. Finally, there's Cheney's newly diagnosed deep vein thrombosis. Any number of health problems can contribute to the development of such clots, including a history of heart attacks, heart failure, or artery disease. A person's risk also rises as the result of extended periods of immobility, such as a long flight—something for Cheney to consider before attempting another world tour like the one he finished February 28, which entailed 65 hours of air travel in nine days.



What exactly does the science say about the impact of an individual's bad heart on his brain? Plenty. On some level, the relationship is commonsensical: Whenever a person's blood flow is compromised, the brain is likely to be affected. "Wear and tear on your arteries is converted to wear and tear on your brain," says Merrill Elias, an epidemiologist and psychologist with Boston University and the University of Maine specializing in the heart-brain connection. "People develop infarcts—areas of the brain that are dead because they've been deprived of blood supply. They have little strokes they're not even aware of." More dramatically, there is also the looming specter of vascular dementia. The second most common form of dementia after Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia is brought on by a disruption in the brain's blood supply due to stroke or damage to tiny blood vessels within the brain. Symptoms range from difficulty concentrating or communicating, to periods of confusion or depression, to memory loss. Unlike the relatively steady progression of Alzheimer's, vascular dementia follows a more uneven course, with symptoms plateauing, or even abating, for periods of time. "Very often, the symptoms of vascular dementia's cognitive impairment are brought on by stress," notes Elias, adding that such troubles are often "accompanied by anger and mood changes."

Beyond such straightforward connections between the circulatory system and the brain, however, researchers are furiously probing some of the more subtle, less understood linkages. Take Elias's investigation of the link between cardiovas-

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cular disease and homocysteine, a by-product of metabolism that, in high concentrations, appears to act as a neurotoxin. As Elias explains it, high blood levels of homocysteine correlate with both cardiovascular disease and cognitive troubles; the causal relationship, however, remains a matter of debate. Other areas of inquiry focus on additional cardiovascular risk factors, such as high cholesterol, hypertension, and obesity.

If Cheney is indeed suffering from congestive heart failure, peripheral artery disease, or both, his staff might also want to check out the latest research on the neurological risks of those particular conditions. Numerous studies both in the United States and abroad (including Italy, Australia, and the Netherlands) indicate a link between congestive heart failure and cognitive decline, with at least one Australian study linking the decline specifically to a reduced ejection fraction. A 2003 study by researchers at the University of Maryland, meanwhile, showed that patients suffering from peripheral artery disease performed significantly worse than others on seven tests measuring a range of cognitive abilities, including concentration, manual dexterity, and executive function (the ability to control one's behavior by managing other brain functions like complex problem-solving and emotional response).

Also of interest to the vice president's people may be the ticklish question of whether heart surgery itself, most notably coronary artery bypass grafting (typically referred to as CABG, or "cabbage," surgery), has a long-term impact on cognitive function. Of late, there has been significant interest in reports that bypass patients may be at an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's and other dementias as they age. But there are less extreme post-op cognitive changes under investigation as well. From bypass patients and their families, you frequently hear stories of people who just didn't feel or behave quite the same after surgery. Such personality changes are extremely common in the short term and may persist indefinitely for some, as the Cleveland Clinic notes in its literature on the subject: "Long-term deficits in mental functioning—such as an inability to process complex problems, follow directions or plan actions—also may occur, although they are often subtle. The person may express these deficits by being short-tempered or easily frustrated. He or she also may be depressed or have mood swings."

The diagnosis in such cases is typically "pump head," or postperfusion syndrome, a cognitive disorder that surfaces in the immediate wake of CABG surgery, possibly as a by-product of stopping a patient's heart and running his blood through a bypass pump (a process that can, among other insults, release tiny air bubbles, fat, blood clots, and other debris into the bloodstream). Initially, pump head was thought to be temporary, with patients returning to normal within a year of surgery. In recent years, however, there has been evidence to suggest it is the improvements that are only temporary. In particular, in a 2001 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers from Duke University found a cognitive decline—defined as a 20 percent drop in test scores from a patient's presurgery performance—in 42 percent of bypass patients five years after surgery.

NONE OF WHICH is to say that Dick Cheney is, in fact, completely mental. As Dr. Mark Newman, lead researcher on the Duke study, notes, the declines in question tend to be subtle, especially in the early going. Moreover, as both Newman and Elias emphasize, people with high levels of education and those who remain mentally active as they age—say, by pulling the strings of the president of the United States—enjoy additional protection from mental slippage thanks to the brain's development of cognitive reserves. Both professors, in fact, caution against attempting any pop diagnosis of this sort on the vice president.

Still, the cognitive erosion associated with cardiovascular problems (like cognitive erosion in general) only worsens with age. And, at 66, the vice president is a bona-fide senior citizen with a three-decade history of serious heart disease. So, the next time you see Cheney behaving oddly, don't automatically assume that he's a bad man. Recall, if you will, a nasty barb hurled at him back in 2005 by Democratic Congressman Charlie Rangel: "I would like to believe he's sick rather than just mean and evil." Partisan snark aside, Rangel may have inadvertently hit upon the heart of the problem.

MICHELLE COTTLE

JAMES VICTORE

Inherit the Wind

My Katrina aftermath.

TO A NEW ORLEANS boy in the early '70s, the only acts of God that offered anything like the pleasure of a hurricane were the big rains that filled up the city like a bathtub and made it possible to paddle down the streets in a canoe, waving at grown-ups trapped inside their floating cars and buses. Compared with the hurricanes, however, these rains were

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second-rate thrills—the Ferris wheel next to the giant roller coaster. They didn't close schools, knock down trees, rip roofs off houses, or even cut the lights. The only reason they deserved to be spoken of in the same breath as hurricanes is that the hurricanes never fulfilled their promise. If you asked me, when I was eight years old, to define "hurricane," I'd have said it was a giant storm built to hit New Orleans that, through some flaw in design, wound up destroying Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Still, the total destruction of Bay St. Louis had some value. Since the early 1900s, when my great-grandfather on my mother's side first staked his claim, our family has owned large tracts of Waveland, a town a few miles west of Bay St. Louis. Persuading city folk that they might escape the heat and mosquitoes of New Orleans by driving 50 miles into the heat and the mosquitoes of Mississippi must count as one of the real estate marketing triumphs of the twentieth century. The main thing about Waveland was that it had no waves. Its sea was a placid lake the color of a Starbucks venti latte, with foam. The land wasn't any more appealing: The grass in front of our house had prickers, and the pine forest out back had water moccasins. Even as a child, I sort of wondered what we were doing spending our vacation in Waveland, Mississippi. Maddeningly, when Hurricane Camille flattened the place in the summer of 1969 and it was of momentary interest, that was the only time we children were not allowed in. "There are too many snakes around," my father told me, to explain why he was leaving me behind. The stories he brought home—of beds in trees, boats in houses, and packs of pet dogs roaming wild—left me determined, the next time a hurricane destroyed our house in Waveland, to be old enough to enjoy the wreckage. A year later, the house was rebuilt, and I began my wait for the next storm.

Thirty-six years later, it finally came, though it took another 18 months before my father caved and agreed to drive me from New Orleans to Waveland to see what Hurricane Katrina had done. It wasn't, for him, a sentimental journey. "I've loathed it from the moment I married your mother," he said, as we crossed Lake Pontchartrain and entered Mississippi. His interest, like mine, has been confined to the moments after the place has been blown to bits. After Hurricane Camille, he now tells me, he had rushed over and found, somewhat thrillingly, nothing of our house but the slab. Oddly enough, he recalled, the front lawn never looked better; it was as pristine as a golf course; the out-rushing sea water had swept it clean. The only sign of life was the caretaker, who had survived Camille in a local shelter. When my father pulled up, he had found her on the ground beside a faucet that drew its water from an artesian well. She had collected a stack of forks and knives and spoons—all that remained of the house and chattels—and was washing them, one by one. "God is punishing us, Mr. Lewis," she had told him. "God is punishing us."

Now, as we roll into town, he looks around and says, "This is much worse than Camille." Eighteen months after Katrina hit, and the place is still desolate. Town isn't town, but a couple of Quonset huts. We get to the beach road, turn left, and look for our place. We can't find it; every landmark has vanished without a trace. The house is not only gone; it's as if the place from which it disappeared is gone, too. Then I spot the stub end of a wooden pole: the old barbed-wire fence.

By the time I was born, a line had been drawn down the middle of the original 20-acre lot purchased nearly a century ago by my mother's grandfather. He had died and left the property to his two children, who promptly began to feud. Two houses had been built, one by my grandfather, the other by his brother's widow, and, just in case there was any doubt who owned what, or where he should be, they had run the barbed-wire fence between them. On either side of it, they had built houses indistinguishable from each other. Here, for 50 years, they had vacationed, on identical lots, inside identical dark green wooden houses, separated by their barbed-wire fence. The only thing to argue about was the pier. It said something about the beach in Waveland that the biggest status symbol on it was a device to get off of it. Our pier was easily the longest in the area, and inherently indivisible. It wasn't our pier, it wasn't their pier, it was a pier held jointly, and the atmosphere around it was, to put it mildly, touchy. In the late '80s, I was visiting Japan when I ruptured a disk in my spine. Drugged and confined by doctors to a hotel bed, I spent two days watching CNN—which was at that moment covering, to the exclusion of all else, a terrifying hurricane that had formed in the Gulf of Mexico. Up and down the Coast raced CNN's intrepid reporter, until, at last, he stood on our pier, which I myself had not set foot on in more than a decade. *Ha!* I thought, *I might be in traction in Tokyo, but our pier is on TV.* Then the camera panned to a family member from the enemy's side of the barbed wire fence. "We're standing on your pier?" asked the reporter. "We're standing on my pier," confirmed the husband of my first cousin once removed, and I shot up out of traction and hollered at the Japanese television, "THAT'S NOT *YOUR* PIER! THAT'S *OUR* PIER!"

Having established the position of the barbed-wire fence, we now can see that the few wooden slats jutting into the water are what remain of our pier. We can see, also, that the acres of dead pine trees are all that remains of our old pine forest, and the mud puddle behind the concrete slab is what remains of the frog pond. Now we find the tennis court: Here, at the age of 13, I jumped and pranced and bragged and hollered after I took a game off my father—prompting him, in a rare burst of anger, to mutter "you little mother" and hit his real first serve. We walk around some more, but, apart from a few oak trees clinging to life, there's nothing else to see. Heading back to his car to drive home, I spot, erect in the dirt, a silver spoon. Once the World Trade Center collapsed, all that remained of the offices was the paper—supposedly because there was so much of it to begin with. Once a hurricane destroys the Gulf Coast, all that remains of the beach houses is the cutlery.

I pick it up, thinking that this is probably the last time I'll come here, and a silver spoon would be a fitting souvenir. Then I remember: It's not mine. My father is a man of many doubts and few convictions, but he'll go to his grave certain that no one should ever bequeath property to be shared by his heirs. Three years ago, after my grandfather died, he immediately persuaded my mother's side of the family to sell the house in Waveland—to another New Orleanian who mistook the place for a beach resort. The 30-foot storm surge, along with the eye of Hurricane Katrina, had trespassed on someone else's property.

Michael Lewis

LARA HARWOOD

Michael Lewis is a former TNR *contributing editor. His most recent book is* The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game.

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GM Gave Me A Mission To Mars

My name is Gerry Voeck. At GM, I worked on developing the technology that helped guide the Viking mission to Mars. Landing on the surface of Mars in 1975 forever changed how we view the universe. I think what GM is doing today will as well. GM's scientists have built the world's first drivable fuel cell by-wire vehicle — a high performance hydrogen propulsion system that emits only clean water vapor. Imagine that! GM is working toward cutting our dependence on petroleum, reducing emissions to nothing, and building a better performing, more powerful vehicle than ever before. Now that's an Earth shattering idea.

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TNR co-founder Walter Lippmann at his desk, 1915.

TNR ARCHIVE

Liberal Values

Three decades of THE NEW REPUBLIC.

THE IDEA that I buy THE NEW REPUBLIC was first broached to me at a dinner party hosted by Senator Eugene McCarthy (in whose 1968 presidential campaign I had worked) and his wife, Abigail, at their house across the street from the National Cathedral. It was there that I met Gilbert Harrison, the deed-holder of the magazine and also its editor. It was he who did the broaching. I do not recall the specific date of this encounter. But I am sure that it was at least three, maybe even four years before the actual transfer of the publication. During that time, Harrison and I conducted a decorous inquest of each other's political histories, present opinions, even social and intellectual prejudices. In Washington, New York, Martha's Vineyard. Over and over again.

I finally acquired TNR in March 1974 and, like two proprietors before me, without so much as a search or a single other applicant, appointed myself editor-in-chief after almost a year of arduous self-restraint. By the time the change took place, the Democratic Party and American liberals had slipped into a deep and disturbing trauma, of which George McGovern's campaign was itself less a cause than a reflection—a pathetic reflection, to be sure. That the *demos* should have chosen someone as demonized as Richard Nixon in the midst of a hated war and after Watergate had begun unraveling told us something stark. And it was not just the colossal margin of his victory that was doing the telling. There was a serious breach in the populace. One evident truth was that the American people were offended by haughty elitists, self-styled revolutionaries, and tribunes of the pretty soul.

The modern usage of the term *liberalism*—synonymous with Hamiltonian statism rather than laissez-faire—originated in these pages. And I've viewed my historic mission as the safeguarding of this sacred legacy from moral decrepitude. Unfortunately, this magazine has not always been a good steward to the ideology that it helped invent.

The most curious figure in the magazine's history was Michael Straight, the son of TNR founder Willard, a Morgan banker, and Dorothy, herself a Whitney and an heiress to Standard Oil. The father had made himself a tool in the opposition to the Supreme Court nomination of Louis D. Brandeis, an intellectual godfather to the editors of TNR, simply by forbidding them to publish a devastating critique, accompanied by a more devastating chart, linking 34 of the nominee's antagonists to particular financial interests and clubs. For the president of Harvard and Henry Adams, it didn't help that Brandeis was a Jew—and a Zionist, no less.

But let's come quickly to the case of Michael Straight. He was a Soviet agent, not exactly a principal, but not a cipher, either, in the espionage network identified with Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, and Anthony Blunt. He was, as his biographer, Roland Perry, puts it, "to the manor born." He did not go to Harvard or Yale, but to Cambridge, where he was called to "the Apostles," an elite society of both culture and communism—a link not quite permitted in the Soviet Union.

In a certain way, THE NEW REPUBLIC was part of Straight's disguise. It's not absolutely certain that he did chores for Moscow when he was truly the editor. But he had flitted about the magazine, even from Cambridge. And, as everybody knows, one is never quite demobilized from a spying operation. It was many years before Straight realized the Soviet Union was a tyranny—a monstrous tyranny.

I have before me a collection of TNR pieces, *The Faces of Five Decades*, with an introduction for each of those decades by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who died within the past fortnight. In his notably evocative prose style, AMS sketches TNR's philosophical commitments and its (certainly in retrospect) silly dalliances. Among these were collectivism, isolationism, and, for a few very long moments, an idiot infatuation with, yes, Stalinism.

Why do I dwell on this tawdry part of the honorable and actually fastidious life of THE NEW REPUBLIC? Because it highlights, perhaps even to the point of exaggeration, the precariousness of the liberal idea and of liberal institutions and liberal men and women when faced with re-

VERBATIM

"At the back of his mind tugged the sense that there must be something easier that would spare him, something he had forgotten, some answer that perversely hid itself from him in his peril. … But he vaguely realized that this thought, too, was a trap."
—LEWIS ("SCOOTER") LIBBY, FROM HIS NOVEL *THE APPRENTICE*

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gimes, movements, and systems of belief (however cruel or crude) that mobilize with words and arms against the United States and its lessons. Forgive me: The United States has something to learn from a few other countries. But many countries have much to learn from us.

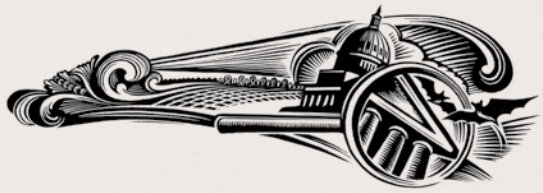
What we have to learn from others is how to flee greed, and how to flee greed in a way that does not sabotage the expansiveness of peoples' lives. Imagine a family of four living on $20,000 a year. The United States could do with a new immersion in egalitarianism. This is still said to be an animating idea of contemporary liberalism. But it's not at all clear to me how much this idea really does animate liberalism's high priests and priestesses, especially those from Hollywood.

What is dogma to many of them is simply the historical and psychological assault on the United States. In the cold war, many Americans did not want the Soviet Union to lose. And that France has now become a heroic nation simply for resisting the invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq is preposterous. After all, France is a closed-minded, prissy, rigidly class-bound, economically retarded, and nostalgic country. Nostalgic for its martial glory that goes back a century plus, and jealous of it, too, in resisting the reality that military might no longer belongs to the motherland. During my time at TNR, we've tried to guide liberalism away from such intellectual mush. To my regret, we haven't always prevailed.

On other fights, we've fared much better—and these could be narrated through the editors I have hired. Neoliberalism was the doctrine on domestic affairs that Michael Kinsley shaped when he came to edit the magazine shortly after I took over. There was more liberalism than neo in the idea. On the other hand, TNR showed that there were unnecessary controls on the economy. We believed and argued for a people's capitalism. Mike also helped me shape an intellectual ethos, too—an ethos that reveled in conflicting opinions and ideological diversity. Trust me, there have been many times when I've hurled my own magazine against the wall in anger.

Other editors following Mike expended much of their analytical fervor on U.S. foreign policy. Rick Hertzberg was a social democrat of the old and freedom-loving school. Andrew Sullivan brought a big dose of cultural originality to the journal. All of these editors were master prose stylists and real intellectuals, besides.

I disagreed with Michael Kelly on pretty much everything domestic, and my dis-



On the Hill

RUNNING MAN

The race that never ended.

Members of Congress are commonly compared to pigs. It's rarer to see them in the flesh with curly pink tails attached to their bottoms. But, late one recent Saturday in Louisville, Kentucky, freshman Representative John Yarmuth worked a room dressed as a hog—of the singing, dancing cowboy variety. As he gladhanded his way through a group of professionals nattily dressed in "cocktail attire," Yarmuth stood out with his sheepskin chaps and ten-gallon hat, not to mention his tail. He had just come from backstage after a charity gala's headline event—a musical-theater revue featuring local celebrities. But, before he could soak up accolades for his rendition of "Pardon Me, Buckaroo," constituents began grilling him about Iraq.

It's not hard to understand why the talk got so heavy so quick. Back in November, Yarmuth and his fellow Democratic challengers leveraged frustration over the war into a congressional majority. But, far from spending their time presiding over a bold reversal of U.S. foreign policy, Yarmuth and the freshmen find themselves still electioneering. Like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, some Democratic freshmen are enmeshed in the exact *same* contests they supposedly ended in November: Half-a-dozen ousted GOP congressmen are talking seriously about running to take their seats back, and two have already filed campaign papers. Out in California, a National Republican Congressional Committee flyer attacking first-term Democrat Jerry McNerney appeared in voters' mailboxes the very day he took office. In the Palm Beach district formerly represented by Mark Foley—which rankles in Republican minds as the single most cruelly stolen seat of last year—four of freshman Democrat Tim Mahoney's prospective GOP opponents have already held a candidates' forum.

OK, House members are career candidates. But this year, the attendant indignities are extra severe. Hell-bent on locking in their majority, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) is requiring 24 freshmen who won by narrow margins to raise between $600,000 and $1 million by June 30. Yarmuth's benchmark is $600,000: To put that number in perspective, it's nearly half of what he raised (besides money he donated to himself) during his entire '06 campaign.

The sense of being perpetually trapped in the 2006 election cycle extends to the man who ran it. While Democratic Caucus Chair Rahm Emanuel is no longer officially head of the DCCC, "it's hard for him to cut ties and walk away," as one aide to a freshman Democrat puts it. "My understanding is," says another aide to a freshman, "the way it's going to work is that Rahm's going to be taking care of all the members who are in tough districts, and [new DCCC chead] Chris Van Hollen's going to be taking care of the challengers and open-seaters." Emanuel's advice to the freshmen ranges from the broad (how to legislate for your district) to the narrow (don't go on "Colbert"). "He's always harping on different members about getting out in the media," says one aide.

Even in casual conversation, this class frequently calls itself the "Majority Makers" or the "Change Agents," grandiloquent titles that help explain why peripatetic campaigning would feel less like the old stumping thrill and more like hell. Emanuel and the DCCC are urging them to spend as little time as possible inside the Beltway to emphasize their local accessibility. "You almost feel like you're on a business trip every week," explains Yarmuth, who, when in Washington, crashes in a Tenleytown apartment he shares with his 23-year-old son, an intern on the House Science Committee. He shows me his BlackBerry for a Monday he spent back home: breakfast at eight to honor black veterans and his district's

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three surviving Tuskegee Airmen, all of whom were too frail to make it; a labor rally; a meeting with mass-transit advocates (they didn't show up); a two-hour confab with the mayor; a date with an autism nonprofit; a meeting with the Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs; a call-in to a radio show; and, finally, a mayor's "Community Conversation" event. "I never stopped, I never ate," Yarmuth says.

For his part, Mahoney moved out of Foley's old offices in government high-rises and opened a retail storefront on a busy square in Stuart, Florida, with his own desk in the front window. Some gregarious freshmen have launched a program called "Congress at Your Corner," where they hang out at local malls or grocery stores. This can prove to be a hit—New York's Kirsten Gillibrand at a Price Chopper elicited a constituent's happy response that "this is what America is all about"—or a miss: When a dashingly fedora-topped McNerney set up shop at a Pleasanton, California, Safeway, a reporter noted that "few shoppers seized the opportunity" to chat, and aides were dispatched to the checkout lines to bring people over.

Sitting with me in a darkened school cafeteria after an education summit, Yarmuth waxes genuinely enthusiastic about the local element of his job. He's working hard with Indiana freshman Baron Hill to solve a traffic nightmare around the Ohio River called Spaghetti Junction. But he also knows he was sent to Washington to do more than conduct an unending battle for voters' affections. "We were sent on a mission," he says. His constituents haven't forgotten: He estimates he hears more, and more urgent, pleas to get the country out of Iraq now than he did during his campaign. But it's turned out his caucus is more fractured than his constituents are. And members of the Democratic leadership—Emanuel in particular—are wary of a hard charge on Iraq, hoping the GOP will keep hanging itself with the issue through 2008. That's not what a Change Agent wants to hear. "All of us thought, 'We can be one of fifteen seats that change the country,'" Yarmuth tells me. "It's totally frustrating."

Eve Fairbanks

agreements came from the left. There was other discord, best left obscure. Soon he was gone from the magazine . . . and, tragically, gone too from the world. Charles Lane put the ship back on its course, for which I am immensely grateful. Peter Beinart brought a certain methodical discipline to TNR, crystallizing the foreign policy that the editors with whom I worked for more than a quarter-century had been painstakingly shaping.

That foreign policy is still relevant today. Its guiding principle is that democratic societies are of philosophical and practical interest to our country, and those who are struggling against tyranny deserve our aid and fraternity. People who live under the heel of dictatorship and are fighting to get out from under are our friends, like the Contras were. We were probably the most consistent American voice for intervention in Bosnia. Genocide is an unmitigated evil, which is why we favored intervention in Rwanda and now believe that, without military intervention, including U.S. force and forces, Darfur is doomed. Simply doomed.

Which brings us to the United Nations—a failing, bloated, corrupt, and unprincipled institution whose very foundations compel it not to act justly. It is functionally the captive of three cynical permanent members of the Security Council and the wild mob of illegitimate states in the General Assembly. The next decade will find us preoccupied with the issue of how democratic societies succeed in this overstructured and overdetermined world disorder.

For my part, I believe that Israel, which was a gleam in the eyes of the earliest editors of TNR, is a test case that the United Nations is failing. The rightful state of the Jews has been under unrelenting attack for decades, now explicitly threatened by a soon-to-be nuclear regime. And we're in the midst of a current bout of anti-Jewish hysteria directly tied to the malevolent and mendacious proposition put forward by the U.N., the European Union, and some Americans that the Palestinians, warring with one another, are ready to make peace with Zion. There is a place for diplomacy—but only if its foundations are honest. Talking often misleads.

You have known my colleague and friend Leon Wieseltier, our literary editor, for more than two decades. He has been my teacher, too. Frank Foer has been the editor of TNR for slightly more than a year, after writing for us for almost half a decade. What an incandescent spirit. I want to confess that these two are instances of a pledge I made to myself. "Try, try very hard not to hire anybody who isn't smarter than you, and wiser." In this, I succeeded.

Deep into its ninth decade, The New Republic is still embarked on its original mission: to shape a just and prosperous society and to build a tolerable world. Wanting more will lead us astray.

Martin Peretz

A History of Violence

We're getting nicer every day.

In sixteenth-century Paris, a popular form of entertainment was cat-burning, in which a cat was hoisted in a sling on a stage and slowly lowered into a fire. According to historian Norman Davies, "[T]he spectators, including kings and queens, shrieked with laughter as the animals, howling with pain, were singed,

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roasted, and finally carbonized." Today, such sadism would be unthinkable in most of the world. This change in sensibilities is just one example of perhaps the most important and most underappreciated trend in the human saga: Violence has been in decline over long stretches of history, and today we are probably living in the most peaceful moment of our species' time on earth.

In the decade of Darfur and Iraq, and shortly after the century of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao, the claim that violence has been diminishing may seem somewhere between hallucinatory and obscene. Yet recent studies that seek to quantify the historical ebb and flow of violence point to exactly that conclusion.

Some of the evidence has been under our nose all along. Conventional history has long shown that, in many ways, we have been getting kinder and gentler. Cruelty as entertainment, human sacrifice to indulge superstition, slavery as a labor-saving device, conquest as the mission statement of government, genocide as a means of acquiring real estate, torture and mutilation as routine punishment, the death penalty for misdemeanors and differences of opinion, assassination as the mechanism of political succession, rape as the spoils of war, pogroms as outlets for frustration, homicide as the major form of conflict resolution—all were unexceptionable features of life for most of human history. But, today, they are rare to nonexistent in the West, far less common elsewhere than they used to be, concealed when they do occur, and widely condemned when they are brought to light.

At one time, these facts were widely appreciated. They were the source of notions like progress, civilization, and man's rise from savagery and barbarism. Recently, however, those ideas have come to sound corny, even dangerous. They seem to demonize people in other times and places, license colonial conquest and other foreign adventures, and conceal the crimes of our own societies. The doctrine of the noble savage—the idea that humans are peaceable by nature and corrupted by modern institutions—pops up frequently in the writing of public intellectuals like José Ortega y Gasset ("War is not an instinct but an invention"), Stephen Jay Gould ("*Homo sapiens* is not an evil or destructive species"), and Ashley Montagu ("Biological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood"). But, now that social scientists have started to count bodies in different historical periods, they have discovered that the romantic theory gets it backward: Far from causing us to become more violent, something in modernity and its cultural institutions has made us nobler.

To be sure, any attempt to document changes in violence must be soaked in uncertainty. In much of the world, the distant past was a tree falling in the forest with no one to hear it, and, even for events in the historical record, statistics are spotty until recent periods. Long-term trends can be discerned only by smoothing out zigzags and spikes of horrific bloodletting. And the choice to focus on relative rather than absolute numbers brings up the moral imponderable of whether it is worse for 50 percent of a population of 100 to be killed or 1 percent in a population of one billion.

Yet, despite these caveats, a picture is taking shape. The decline of violence is a fractal phenomenon, visible at the scale of millennia, centuries, decades, and years. It applies over several orders of magnitude of violence, from genocide to war to rioting to homicide to the treatment of children and animals. And it appears to be a worldwide trend, though not a homogeneous one. The leading edge has been in Western societies, especially England and Holland, and there seems to have been a tipping point at the onset of the Age of Reason in the early seventeenth century.

At the widest-angle view, one can see a whopping difference across the millennia that separate us from our pre-state ancestors. Contra leftist anthropologists who celebrate the noble savage, quantitative body-counts—such as the proportion of prehistoric skeletons with axemarks and embedded arrowheads or the proportion of men in a contemporary foraging tribe who die at the hands of other men—suggest that pre-state societies were far more violent than our own. It is true that raids and battles killed a tiny percentage of the numbers that die in modern warfare. But, in tribal violence, the clashes are more frequent, the percentage of men in the population who fight is greater, and the rates of death per battle are higher. According to anthropologists like Lawrence Keeley, Stephen LeBlanc, Phillip Walker, and Bruce Knauft, these factors combine to yield population-wide rates of death in tribal warfare that dwarf those of modern times. If the wars of the twentieth century had killed the same proportion of

LARA HARWOOD

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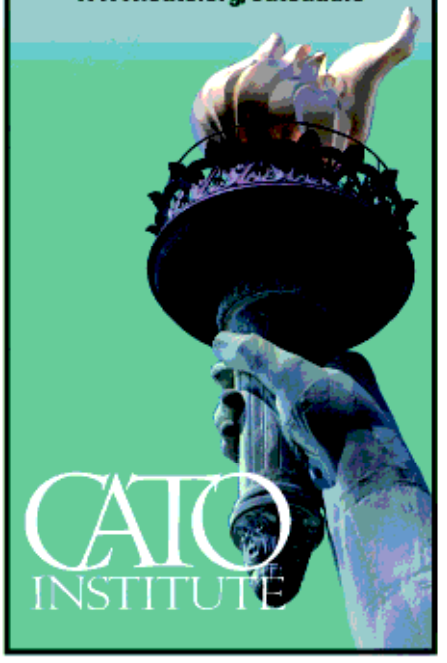

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President Bush, touting his successful environmental policy, holds up the last remaining piece of Greenland. (Alec D)

the population that die in the wars of a typical tribal society, there would have been two billion deaths, not 100 million.

Political correctness from the other end of the ideological spectrum has also distorted many people's conception of violence in early civilizations—namely, those featured in the Bible. This supposed source of moral values contains many celebrations of genocide, in which the Hebrews, egged on by God, slaughter every last resident of an invaded city. The Bible also prescribes death by stoning as the penalty for a long list of nonviolent infractions, including idolatry, blasphemy, homosexuality, adultery, disrespecting one's parents, and picking up sticks on the Sabbath. The Hebrews, of course, were no more murderous than other tribes; one also finds frequent boasts of torture and genocide in the early histories of the Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Chinese.

At the century scale, it is hard to find quantitative studies of deaths in warfare spanning medieval and modern times. Several historians have suggested that there has been an increase in the number of recorded wars across the centuries to the present, but, as political scientist James Payne has noted, this may show only that "the Associated Press is a more comprehensive source of information about battles around the world than were sixteenth-century monks." Social histories of the West provide evidence of numerous barbaric practices that became obsolete in the last five centuries, such as slavery, amputation, blinding, branding, flaying, disembowelment, burning at the stake, breaking on the wheel, and so on. Meanwhile, for another kind of violence—homicide—the data are abundant and striking. The criminologist Manuel Eisner has assembled hundreds of homicide estimates from Western European localities that kept records at some point between 1200 and the mid-1990s. In every country he analyzed, murder rates declined steeply—for example, from 24 homicides per 100,000 Englishmen in the fourteenth century to 0.6 per 100,000 by the early 1960s.

On the scale of decades, comprehensive data again paint a shockingly happy picture: Global violence has fallen steadily since the middle of the twentieth century. According to the *Human Security Brief 2006*, the number of battle deaths in interstate wars has declined from more than 65,000 per year in the 1950s to less than 2,000 per year in this decade. In Western Europe and the Americas, the second half of the century saw a steep decline in the number of wars, military coups, and deadly ethnic riots.

Zooming in by a further power of ten exposes yet another reduction. After the cold war, every part of the world saw a steep drop-off in state-based conflicts, and those that do occur are more likely to end in negotiated settlements rather than being fought to the bitter end. Meanwhile, according to political scientist Barbara Harff, between 1989 and 2005 the number of campaigns of mass killing of civilians decreased by 90 percent.

The decline of killing and cruelty poses several challenges to our ability to make sense of the world. To begin with, how could so many people be so wrong about something so important? Partly, it's because of a cognitive illusion: We estimate the probability of an event from how easy it is to recall examples. Scenes of carnage are more likely to be relayed to our living rooms and burned into our memories than footage of people dying of old age. Partly, it's an intellectual culture that is loath to admit that there could be anything good about the institutions of civilization and Western society. Partly, it's the incentive structure of the activism and opinion markets: No one ever attracted followers and donations by announcing that things keep getting better. And part of the explanation lies in the phenomenon itself. The decline of violent behavior has been paralleled by a decline in attitudes that tolerate or glorify violence, and often the attitudes are in the lead. As deplorable as they are, the abuses at Abu Ghraib and the lethal injections of a few murderers in Texas are mild by the standards of atrocities in human history. But, from a contemporary vantage point, we see them as signs of how low our behavior can sink, not of how high our standards have risen.

The other major challenge posed by the decline of violence is how to explain it. A force that pushes in the same direction across many epochs, continents, and scales of social organization mocks our standard tools of causal explanation. The usual suspects—guns, drugs, the press, American culture—aren't nearly up to the job. Nor could it possibly be explained by evolution in the biologist's sense: Even if the meek could inherit the earth, natural selection could not favor the genes for meekness quickly enough. In any case, human nature has not changed so much as to have lost its taste for violence. Social psychologists find that at least 80 percent of people have fantasized about killing someone they don't like. And modern humans still take pleasure in viewing violence, if we are to judge by the popularity of murder mysteries, Shakespearean dramas, Mel Gibson movies, video games, and hockey.

What *has* changed, of course, is peo-

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ple's willingness to act on these fantasies. The sociologist Norbert Elias suggested that European modernity accelerated a "civilizing process" marked by increases in self-control, long-term planning, and sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others. These are precisely the functions that today's cognitive neuroscientists attribute to the prefrontal cortex. But this only raises the question of why humans have increasingly exercised that part of their brains. No one knows why our behavior has come under the control of the better angels of our nature, but there are four plausible suggestions.

The first is that Hobbes got it right. Life in a state of nature is nasty, brutish, and short, not because of a primal thirst for blood but because of the inescapable logic of anarchy. Any beings with a modicum of self-interest may be tempted to invade their neighbors to steal their resources. The resulting fear of attack will tempt the neighbors to strike first in preemptive self-defense, which will in turn tempt the first group to strike against *them* preemptively, and so on. This danger can be defused by a policy of deterrence—don't strike first, retaliate if struck—but, to guarantee its credibility, parties must avenge all insults and settle all scores, leading to cycles of bloody vendetta. These tragedies can be averted by a state with a monopoly on violence, because it can inflict disinterested penalties that eliminate the incentives for aggression, thereby defusing anxieties about preemptive attack and obviating the need to maintain a hair-trigger propensity for retaliation. Indeed, Eisner and Elias attribute the decline in European homicide to the transition from knightly warrior societies to the centralized governments of early modernity. And, today, violence continues to fester in zones of anarchy, such as frontier regions, failed states, collapsed empires, and territories contested by mafias, gangs, and other dealers of contraband.

Payne suggests another possibility: that the critical variable in the indulgence of violence is an overarching sense that life is cheap. When pain and early death are everyday features of one's own life, one feels fewer compunctions about inflicting them on others. As technology and economic efficiency lengthen and improve our lives, we place a higher value on life in general.

A third theory, championed by Robert Wright, invokes the logic of nonzero-sum games: scenarios in which two agents can each come out ahead if they cooperate, such as trading goods, dividing up labor, or sharing the peace dividend that comes from laying down their arms. As people acquire know-how that they can share cheaply with others and develop technologies that allow them to spread their goods and ideas over larger territories at lower cost, their incentive to cooperate steadily increases, because other people become more valuable alive than dead.

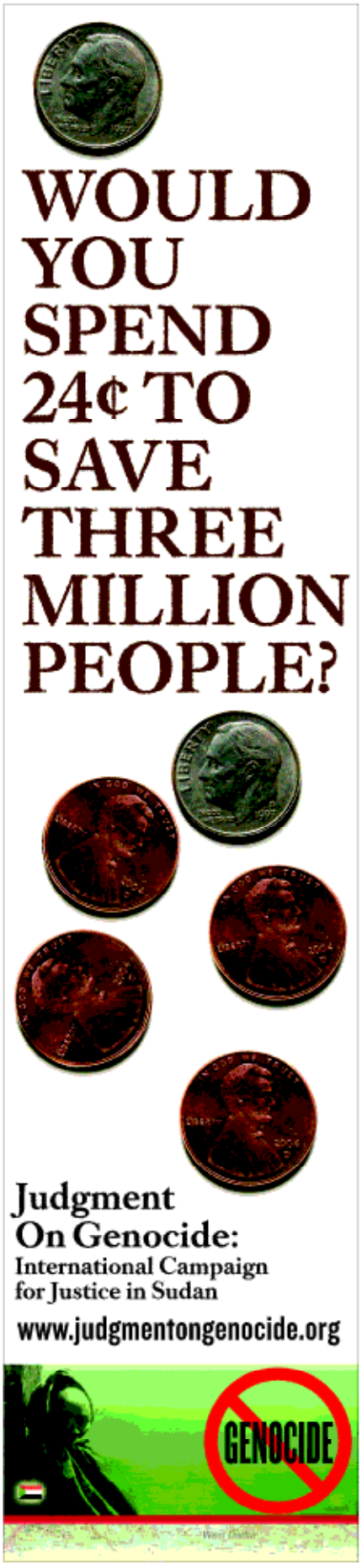
Then there is the scenario sketched by philosopher Peter Singer. Evolution, he suggests, bequeathed people a small kernel of empathy, which by default they apply only within a narrow circle of friends and relations. Over the millennia, people's moral circles have expanded to encompass larger and larger polities: the clan, the tribe, the nation, both sexes, other races, and even animals. The circle may have been pushed outward by expanding networks of reciprocity, à la Wright, but it might also be inflated by the inexorable logic of the golden rule: The more one knows and thinks about other living things, the harder it is to privilege one's own interests over theirs. The empathy escalator may also be powered by cosmopolitanism, in which journalism, memoir, and realistic fiction make the inner lives of other people, and the contingent nature of one's own station, more palpable—the feeling that "there but for fortune go I."

Whatever its causes, the decline of violence has profound implications. It is not a license for complacency: We enjoy the peace we find today because people in past generations were appalled by the violence in their time and worked to end it, and so we should work to end the appalling violence in our time. Nor is it necessarily grounds for optimism about the immediate future, since the world has never before had national leaders who combine pre-modern sensibilities with modern weapons.

But the phenomenon does force us to rethink our understanding of violence. Man's inhumanity to man has long been a subject for moralization. With the knowledge that something has driven it dramatically down, we can also treat it as a matter of cause and effect. Instead of asking, "Why is there war?" we might ask, "Why is there peace?" From the likelihood that states will commit genocide to the way that people treat cats, we must have been doing something right. And it would be nice to know what, exactly, it is.

Steven Pinker

Steven Pinker is Johnstone Family Professor at Harvard University. His latest book, The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window Into Human Nature, *will be published by Viking this year.*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The Agitator

Barack Obama's unlikely political education.

RYAN LIZZA

In 1985, Barack Obama traveled halfway across the country to take a job that he didn't fully understand. But, while he knew little about his new vocation—community organizer—it still had a romantic ring, at least to his 24-year-old ears. With his old classmates from Columbia, he had talked frequently about political change. Now, he was moving to Chicago to put that talk into action. His 1995 memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, recounts his idealistic effusions: "Change won't come from the top, I would say. Change will come from a mobilized grass roots. That's what I'll do. I'll organize black folks. At the grass roots. For change."

His excitement wasn't rooted merely in youthful enthusiasm but also in the psychology of a vagabond. By 1985, Obama had already lived in Hawaii, where he was born and raised by his white mother and grandparents; Indonesia, where he lived briefly as a child; Los Angeles, where he started college; and New York, where he finished it. After these itinerant years, he would finally be able to insinuate himself into a community—and not just any community, but, as he later put it, "the capital of the African American community in the country." Every strain of black political thought seemed to converge in Chicago in the 1980s. It was the intellectual center of black nationalism, the base both for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns and for Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. Moreover, on the eve of Obama's arrival, Harold Washington had overthrown Richard J. Daley's white ethnic machine to become the city's first black mayor. It was, in short, an ideal place for an identity-starved Kenyan Kansan to immerse himself in a more typical black American experience.

Not long after Obama arrived, he sat down for a cup of coffee in Hyde Park with a fellow organizer named Mike Kruglik. Obama's work focused on helping poor blacks on Chicago's South Side fight the city for things like job banks and asbestos removal. His teachers were schooled in a style of organizing devised by Saul Alinsky, the radical University of Chicago–trained social scientist. At the heart of the Alinsky method is the concept of "agitation"—making someone angry enough about the rotten state of his life that he agrees to take action to change it; or, as Alinsky himself described the job, to "rub raw the sores of discontent."

On this particular evening, Kruglik was debriefing Obama about his work when a panhandler approached. Instead of ignoring the man, Obama confronted him. "Now, young man, is that really what you want be about?" Obama demanded. "I mean, come on, don't you want to be better than that? Let's get yourself together."

Kruglik remembers this episode as an example of why, in ten years of training organizers, Obama was the best student he ever had. He was a natural, the undisputed master of agitation, who could engage a room full of recruiting targets in a rapid-fire Socratic dialogue, nudging them to admit that they were not living up to their own standards. As with the panhandler, he could be aggressive and confrontational. With probing, sometimes personal questions, he would pinpoint the source of pain in their lives, tearing down their egos just enough before dangling a carrot of hope that they could make things better.

More than 20 years later, Obama presents himself as a post-partisan consensus builder, not a rabble-rouser, and certainly not a disciple of Alinsky, who disdained electoral politics and titled his organizing manifesto *Rules for Radicals*. On the stump, Obama makes a pitch for "common-sense, practical, nonideological solutions." And, although he's anchored to a center-left worldview, he gives the impression of being above the ideological fray—a fresh face who is a generation removed from the polarizing turmoil of the 1960s. The mirror he holds up is invariably flattering—reflecting back a tolerant, forward-looking electorate ready to unite around his consensus-minded brand of politics. Indeed, if there has been a knock on Obama's campaign in these early days, it's that it may be a bit too idealistic for the realities of a presidential race. With his lofty rhetoric and careful positioning as above politics, Obama in some ways recalls Bill Bradley, another candidate of moral purity—and one whose unwillingness to engage in the rough-and-tumble of modern politics ultimately proved his undoing.

Yet Obama connects his past as a Chicago organizer to his presidential bid with surprising ease. Last month, during his first visit to South Carolina since his campaign announcement, we discussed his community-organizing days. He sat at the head of a long table inside a dimly lit hotel conference room in Columbia and ate a chocolate energy bar. When I began to suggest links between his organizing work then and his current campaign, he interrupted: "I think there is. I don't think you need to strain for it." He was at home talking Alinskian jargon about "agitation," which he defined as "challenging people to scrape away habit," and he fondly recalled organizing workshops where he learned the concept of "being predisposed to other people's power."

Publicly, as well, Obama has made his organizing days central to his political identity. When he announced his candidacy for president last month, he said the "best education" he ever had was not his undergraduate years at Occidental and Columbia or even his time at Harvard Law School, but rather the four years he spent in the mid-'80s learning the science of community organizing in Chicago. The night after Obama's announcement speech, he made a similar point on "60 Minutes" as he led Steve Kroft around the old neighborhood.

Obama's self-conception as an organizer isn't just a campaign gimmick. Organizing remained central to Obama long after his stint on the South Side. In the 13 years between Obama's return to Chicago from law school and his Senate campaign, he was deeply involved with the city's constellation of community-organizing groups. He wrote about the subject. He attended organizing seminars. He served on the boards of foundations that support community organizing. He taught Alinsky's concepts and methods in workshops. When he first ran for office in 1996, he pledged to bring the spirit of community organizing to his job in the state Senate. And, after he was elected to the U.S. Senate, his wife, Michelle, told a reporter, "Barack is not a politician first and foremost. He's a community activist exploring the viability of politics to make change." Recalling her remark in 2005, Obama wrote, "I take

Brooks Kraft

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that observation as a compliment."

By defining himself as a "community organizer" above all else, Obama is linking himself to America's radical democratic tradition and presenting himself as an heir to a particular political style and methodology that, at least superficially, contrasts sharply with the candidate Obama has become. Community organizers see themselves as disciples of Thomas Paine and the colonists who dumped tea in Boston Harbor. Historically, they have revered the tactics of the labor militants of the 1930s, and they became famous in the '60s for the political theater championed by Alinsky, illustrated most memorably by his threat of a "fart-in" at a Rochester, New York, opera house to bring attention to the Kodak company's refusal to hire blacks.

Needless to say, this doesn't sound much like the placid politician who wrote *The Audacity of Hope*. And it raises questions about Obama's authentic political identity that require traveling back to the years when community organizing gave him the best education of his life.

A YEAR AFTER graduating from Columbia, Obama spotted an intriguing help-wanted ad in *The New York Times*. The Calumet Community Religious Conference (CCRC), a group that aimed to convert the black churches of Chicago's South Side into agents of social change, was looking for a community organizer to run the group's inner-city arm, the Developing Communities Project (DCP). Obama soon arranged to meet in New York with the organizer heading up the job search.

Obama had spent the previous year on a fruitless quest. He worked briefly for a Ralph Nader outfit in Harlem teaching college kids about recycling and then on a losing assemblyman's race in Brooklyn. But he longed for an experience that connected him to the civil rights era. "In the sit-ins, the marches, the jailhouse songs," he wrote in *Dreams*, "I saw the African-American community becoming more than just the place where you'd been born or the house where you'd been raised. Through organizing, through shared sacrifice, membership had been earned." Obama wanted to join the club.

"What really inspired me," Obama told me during one of several conversations about his work as an organizer, "was the civil rights movement. And if you asked me who my role model was at that time, it would probably be Bob Moses, the famous SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] organizer. … Those were the folks I was really inspired by—the John Lewises, the Bob Moseses, the Fannie Lou Hamers, the Ella Bakers."

Instead, he got Gerald Kellman, a Jewish organizer in a rumpled, tea-stained shirt. While Obama was in search of an authentic African American experience, Kellman was simply in search of an authentic African American. His organization worked in black neighborhoods decimated by the shuttering of economic behemoths like U.S. Steel, agitating the unemployed to demand jobs and safer streets. But, for all the anger and poverty in these places, Kellman and his comrades couldn't break through. Because he and his fellow organizers, Mike Kruglik and Gregory Galluzzo, were white (and two of the three were Jewish), the black pastors viewed them with suspicion and, in some cases, outright disdain. Kellman, who had paid what he considered a small fortune for the *Times* ad, desperately needed a young black man to give the group credibility.

The job with the DCP allowed Obama entrée into the poor black neighborhoods with which he was so eager to connect. But serving as the black representative for a trio of white organizers wasn't exactly the community-organizing fantasy he had in mind. Rather, as Obama says today, "This was the closest I could find." Kellman, Kruglik, and Galluzzo weren't schooled in civil rights–era organizing, but in the teachings of Alinsky, who distrusted movement politics and even Martin Luther King Jr. But, although Obama didn't quite find himself reliving the civil rights era, he soon found himself succumbing to the appeal of Alinsky's organizing methodology.

In *Dreams*, Obama spent some 150 pages on his four years in Chicago working as an organizer, but there's little discussion of the theory that undergirded his work and informed that of his teachers. Alinsky is the missing layer of his account.

Born in 1909 to Russian-Jewish immigrants, Alinsky had prowled the same neighborhoods that Obama now worked and internalized many of the same lessons. As a University of Chicago criminology graduate student, he ingratiated himself with Al Capone's mobsters to learn all he could about the dynamics of the city's underworld, an experience that helped foster a lifelong appreciation for seeing the world as it actually exists, rather than through the academic's idealized prism. Charming and self-absorbed, Alinsky would entertain friends with stories—some true, many embellished—from his mob days for decades afterward. He was profane, outspoken, and narcissistic, always the center of attention despite his tweedy, academic look and thick, horn-rimmed glasses.

Alinsky was deeply influenced by the great social science insight of his times, one developed by his professors at Chicago: that the pathologies of the urban poor were not hereditary but environmental. This idea, that people could change their lives by changing their surroundings, led him to take an obscure social science phrase—"the community organization"—and turn it into, in the words of Alinsky biographer Sanford Horwitt, "something controversial, important, even romantic." His starting point was an early fascination with John L. Lewis, the great labor leader and founder of the CIO. What if, Alinsky wondered, the same hardheaded tactics used by unions could be applied to the relationship between citizens and public officials?

To test his theory, Alinsky left the world of academia in the 1930s and set up shop in Chicago's meatpacking neighborhood, the "Back of the Yards"—the same wretched, multiethnic enclave that Upton Sinclair had chronicled three decades earlier in *The Jungle*. He created the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, which won a succession of victories against businesses and decreased crime, while increasing cooperation between rival ethnic groups. The results were impressive enough that they were celebrated far beyond Chicago in newspaper stories with headlines like, "THEY CALLED HIM A 'RED,' BUT YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST DID THE JOB."

Alinsky had been dead for more than a decade when Obama arrived in Chicago, but his legacy was still very much alive. Kruglik, Kellman, and Galluzzo had all studied his teachings through the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the organizing school Alinsky founded. By the '80s, not even the IAF strictly adhered to every principle that Alinsky taught. But at least one of Obama's teachers considered himself a true believer: "I regard myself as St. Paul who never met Jesus," Galluzzo told me of Alinsky, who died shortly after Galluzzo moved to Chicago on a pilgrimage to meet him in 1972. "I'm his best disciple." Alinsky has attracted other, more famous admirers, including Hillary Clinton, who wrote an undergraduate thesis about him, a favorite bit of trivia for right-wingers.

But, while Alinsky is often viewed as an ideological figure—toward the end of his life, New Left radicals tried to claim him as one of their own—to place Alinsky within a taxonomy of left-wing politics is to miss the point. His legacy is

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less ideological than methodological. Alinsky's contribution to community organizing was to create a set of rules, a clear-eyed and systemic approach that ordinary citizens can use to gain public power. The first and most fundamental lesson Obama learned was to reassess his understanding of power. Horwitt says that, when Alinsky would ask new students why they wanted to organize, they would invariably respond with selfless bromides about wanting to help others. Alinsky would then scream back at them that there was a one-word answer: "You want to organize for *power*!"

Galluzzo shared with me the manual he uses to train new organizers, which is little different from the version he used to train Obama in the '80s. It is filled with workshops and chapter headings on understanding power: "power analysis," "elements of a power organization," "the path to power." Galluzzo told me that many new trainees have an aversion to Alinsky's gritty approach because they come to organizing as idealists rather than realists. But Galluzzo's manual instructs them to get over these hang-ups. "We are not virtuous by not wanting power," it says. "We are really cowards for not wanting power," because "power is good" and "powerlessness is evil."

The other fundamental lesson Obama was taught is Alinsky's maxim that self-interest is the only principle around which to organize people. (Galluzzo's manual goes so far as to advise trainees in block letters: "GET RID OF DO-GOODERS IN YOUR CHURCH AND YOUR ORGANIZATION.") Obama was a fan of Alinsky's realistic streak. "The key to creating successful organizations was making sure people's self-interest was met," he told me, "and not just basing it on pie-in-the-sky idealism. So there were some basic principles that remained powerful then, and in fact I still believe in."

Chicago pastors still remember Obama making the rounds of local churches and conducting interviews—in organizing lingo, "one-on-ones"—where he would probe for self-interest. The Reverend Alvin Love, the Baptist minister of a modest brick church amid the clapboard bungalows of the South Side, was one of Obama's first one-on-ones. During a recent visit to his church, Love told me, "I remember he said this to me: 'There ought to be some way for us to help you meet your self-interest while at the same time meeting the real interests and the needs of the community.'"

Obama so mastered the workshops on power that he later taught them himself. On his campaign website, one can find a photo of Obama in a classroom teaching students Alinskian methods. He stands in front of a blackboard on which he has written, "Power Analysis" and "Relationships Built on Self Interest," an idea illustrated by a diagram of the flow of money from corporations to the mayor.

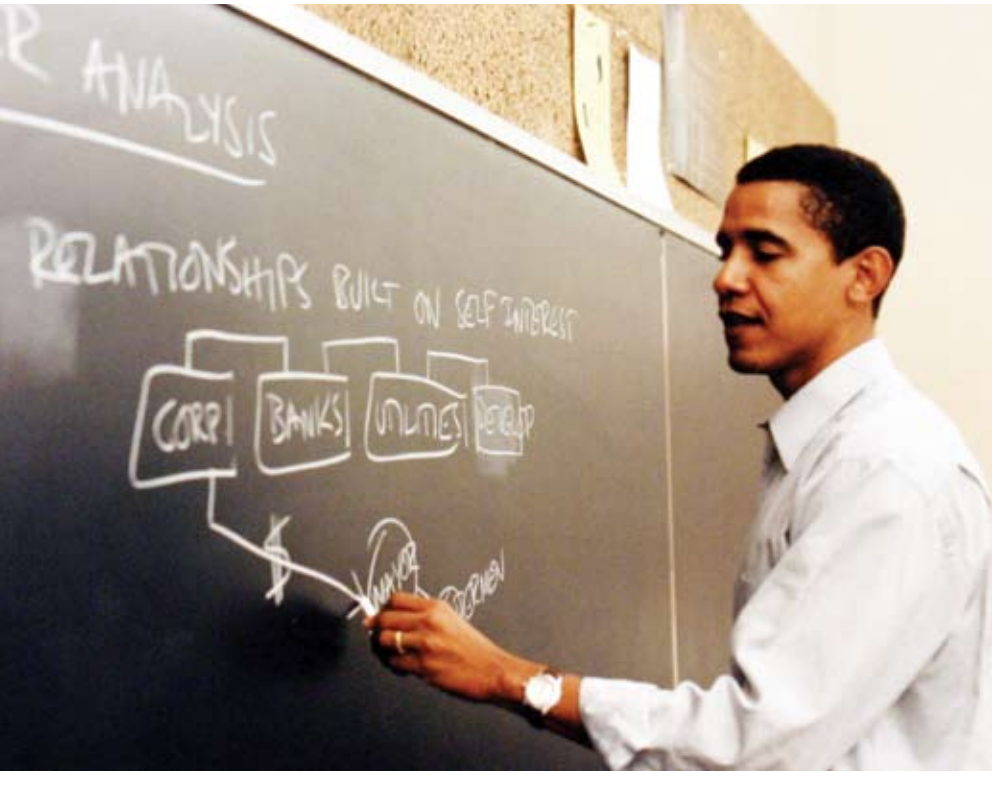
But, although he was a first-class student of Alinsky's method, Obama also saw its limits. It appealed to his head but not his heart. For instance, Alinsky relished baiting politicians or low-level bureaucrats into public meetings where they would be humiliated. Obama found these "accountability sessions" unsettling, even cruel. "Oftentimes, these elected officials didn't have that much more power than the people they represented," he told me.

At one meeting, where residents of an asbestos-laden housing project confronted their property manager about whether their homes had been tested, Obama suddenly had the urge to warn his target. "I wanted to somehow let Mr. Anderson know that I understood his dilemma," Obama wrote in *Dreams*, with the kind of empathy that is the hallmark of his autobiography. He was sometimes more interested in connecting with folks on the South Side than organizing them. He studied the characters he encountered so closely that Kruglik says Obama turned his field reports into short stories about the hopes and struggles of the local pastors and congregants with whom he was trying to commune.

Where some of Alinsky's disciples speak of his work with religious fervor, Obama maintained some detachment during these years. In his memoir, he gently mocked Marty Kauffman, the character based on Kellman (and a touch of Kruglik), who is a little too clinical in his approach and never puts down any roots in the community. "[I]t occurred to me that he'd made no particular attachments to people or place during his three years in the area, that whatever human warmth or connection he might require came from elsewhere," he wrote. Obama was determined not to end up like that. He needed something more than organizing theory to make the South Side his home.

As it was, he ran into the same roadblock as his trainers had. "Obama," Galluzzo told me, "was constantly being harassed by people saying, 'Oh, you work for that white person.' " On one occasion, he eagerly tried to make his pitch about joining DCP to a Reverend Smalls. Smalls wasn't interested. "I think I remember some white man coming around talking about some developing something or other," he told Obama. "Funny-looking guy. Jewish name." His hostility only grew when Obama explained that Catholic priests were also

Obama teaches a community-organizing workshop in Chicago.



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involved. "Listen … what's your name again? Obamba?" Smalls asked without waiting for an answer. "Listen, Obamba, you may mean well. I'm sure you do. But the last thing we need is to join up with a bunch of white money and Catholic churches and Jewish organizers to solve our problems." Obama left the meeting crestfallen.

On a Sunday morning two weeks before he launches his presidential campaign, Obama is at Trinity United Church of Christ on the South Side, gently swaying from side to side under a giant iron cross. From the outside, the church looks more like a fortress than a house of worship, with high whitewashed brick walls topped with security cameras. Inside, Trinity is the sort of African American community that the young Obama longed to connect with when he first came to Chicago. The church's motto is "unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian," and sunlight streams through stained glass windows depicting the life of a black Jesus. The Reverend Doctor Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., Trinity's pastor since 1972, flies a red, black, and green flag near his altar and often preaches in a dashiki. He has spent decades writing about the African roots of Christianity, partly as a way to convince young blacks tempted by Islam that Christianity is not "a white man's religion."

On this particular Sunday, the sea of black worshippers is dotted with a few white folks up in the balcony, clutching copies of *The Audacity of Hope* they've brought for Obama's book-signing later. Obama, sitting in the third row with his wife and two daughters, Malia and Natasha, stands, claps, prays, and sways along with the rest of the congregation. During the sermon, he watches the preacher carefully and writes notes. When asked by Wright to say a few words, Obama grabs the microphone and stands. "I love you all," he says. "It's good to be back home." The 150-person choir breaks into a chorus of "Barack, Hallelujah! Barack, Hallelujah!"

This adulation is a far cry from how Obama was received by Wright when they first met in the mid-'80s, during Obama's initial round of one-on-ones. Like Smalls, Wright was unimpressed. "They were going to bring all different denominations together to have this grassroots movement," explained Wright, a white-haired man with a goatee and a booming voice. "I looked at him and I said, 'Do you know what Joseph's brother said when they saw him coming across the field?' " Obama said he didn't. "I said, 'Behold the dreamer! You're dreaming if you think you are going to do that.' "

From Wright and others, Obama learned that part of his problem as an organizer was that he was trying to build a confederation of churches but wasn't showing up in the pews on Sunday. When pastors asked him the inevitable questions about his own spiritual life, Obama would duck them uncomfortably. A Reverend Philips put the problem to him squarely when he learned that Obama didn't attend services. "It might help your mission if you had a church home," he told Obama. "It doesn't matter where, really. What you're asking from pastors requires us to set aside some of our more priestly concerns in favor of prophesy. That requires a good deal of faith on our part. It makes us want to know just where you're getting yours from."

After many lectures like this, Obama decided to take a second look at Wright's church. Older pastors warned him that Trinity was for "Buppies"—black urban professionals—and didn't have enough street cred. But Wright was a former Muslim and black nationalist who had studied at Howard and Chicago, and Trinity's guiding principles—what the church calls the "Black Value System"—included a "Disavowal of the Pursuit of 'Middleclassness.'"

The crosscurrents appealed to Obama. He came to believe that the church could not only compensate for the limitations of Alinsky-style organizing but could help answer the nagging identity problem he had come to Chicago to solve. "It was a powerful program, this cultural community," he wrote, "one more pliant than simple nationalism, more sustaining than my own brand of organizing."

As a result, over the years, Wright became not only Obama's pastor, but his mentor. The title of Obama's recent book, *The Audacity of Hope*, is based on a sermon by Wright. (It's worth noting, however, that, while Obama's book is a coolheaded appeal for common ground in an age of political polarization, Wright's sermon, "The Audacity to Hope," is a fiery jeremiad about persevering in a world of nuclear arms and racial inequality.) Wright is one of the first people Obama thanked after his Senate victory in 2004, and he recently name-checked Wright in his speech to civil rights leaders in Selma, Alabama.

The church also helped Obama develop politically. It provided him with new insights about getting people to act, or agitating, that his organizing pals didn't always understand. "It's true that the notion of self-interest was critical," Obama told me. "But Alinsky understated the degree to which people's hopes and dreams and their ideals and their values were just as important in organizing as people's self-interest." He continued, "Sometimes the tendency in community organizing of the sort done by Alinsky was to downplay the power of words and of ideas when in fact ideas and words are pretty powerful. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men are created equal.' Those are just words. 'I have a dream.' Just words. But they help move things. And I think it was partly that understanding that probably led me to try to do something similar in different arenas."

In 1995, Obama shocked his old friend Jean Rudd by telling her he wanted to run for the state Senate. Back in 1985, Rudd, then working at the Woods Fund—a Chicago foundation that gives grants for community organizing—had provided Kellman with his original $25,000 to hire Obama. When Obama returned to Chicago to practice law, he joined the board of Rudd's foundation. Now he was going to the other side. "That's a switch!" she told him. Obama insisted that nothing would change. "Oh no," he said, according to Rudd. "I'm going to use the same skills as a community organizer."

In fact, Obama had already been applying Alinsky's core concepts—rigorous analysis of an opponent's strengths, a hardheaded understanding of self-interest as a fundamental organizing principle, a knack for agitating people to act, and a streetwise sense of when a raw show of power is necessary—to situations beyond the South Side. In 1988, Obama left Chicago for Harvard Law, where his greatest political victory was getting himself elected president of the law review. He did it by convincing a crucial swing bloc of conservatives that their self-interests would be protected by electing him. He built that trust during the same kind of long listening sessions he had made use of in the depressed neighborhoods of Chicago. "He didn't get to be president of Harvard Law Review because he was first in his class," said Richard Epstein, a colleague of Obama's at the University of Chicago Law School, where Obama later taught. "He got it because people on the other side believed he would give them a fair shake."

Even at Harvard, Obama kept a foot in the world of organizing. He spent eight days in Los Angeles taking a national training course taught by the IAF, a station of the cross for Alinsky acolytes.

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And, after he returned to Chicago in 1991, he served on the boards of both the Woods Fund and the Joyce Foundation, which also gives grants to Alinsky-style groups, and continued to teach organizing workshops.

In 1992, he got a taste of the relationship between organizing and electoral politics when he led a voter registration drive that helped Carol Moseley Braun become the first black woman ever elected to the Senate. By 1995, he laid out his vision of the agitator-politician in an interview with the *Chicago Reader*: "What if a politician were to see his job as that of an organizer, as part teacher and part advocate, one who does not sell voters short but who educates them about the real choices before them? As an elected public official, for instance, I could bring church and community leaders together easier than I could as a community organizer or lawyer."

This high-minded mission statement, however, obscures the real-world organizing skills that proved relevant to Obama's political career. They surface in the story of his first campaign. Obama initially planned to inherit the seat of a much-admired incumbent named Alice Palmer, a fixture in South Side activist circles since the '60s. Palmer had opted to run for Congress, clearing the way for Obama to replace her, but, when she lost the primary, she decided she wanted to keep her old Senate seat, after all.

Obama was faced with a decision: step aside and wait his turn or do everything he could to take down a popular incumbent. In one meeting, an old guard of black political leaders tried to force Obama to abandon the race, but he wouldn't budge. Instead of deferring to Palmer's seniority, Obama challenged the very legitimacy of her petitions to get on the ballot, dispatching aides to the Chicago Board of Elections to scour Palmer's filing papers, and, while they were at it, every other candidate's, signature by signature. Many were fake. Obama won the challenge and cleared not just Palmer but all his potential rivals from the field.

It was a brash maneuver that caught the attention of the Illinois political establishment. "His introduction to the political community was that he knocked off Alice," said Ron Davis, a longtime Obama political hand who filed the challenge against Palmer and still cackles with glee over their victory. "The [current] president of the state Senate, Emil Jones, pushed very hard to save Alice, but we beat his staff. So they heard about Barack before he came down there to Springfield: 'Who was this guy who came in and knocked Alice off the ballot?'"

In the wake of Obama's recent contretemps with the Clinton campaign—she asked him to return money raised by Hollywood mogul David Geffen after Geffen had some acid words for her in the press; Obama declined—this episode acquires added resonance. The core question being raised today about Obama the candidate is whether he can be both a post-partisan, inspirational figure—the dreamer whom Wright first identified—and also the type of uncompromising political realist who can actually win. After all, the presidential campaign trail is littered with candidates, from Adlai Stevenson to Bradley, who, like Obama, bemoaned the dirty business that politics has become and tried to run campaigns that rose above the muck. Such candidates may maintain the high ground, but they always lose. Obama's assertion that he is, at heart, a community organizer suggests he might not fall into the same trap. He was, after all, trained to pursue the ideal but practice the pragmatic. Obama internalized the Alinsky maxim to always live in "the world as it is and not as we would like it to be," and, starting with his race against Palmer, he put it to use. In the world as we would like it to be, every election should have more than one contestant. In the world as it is, especially in Chicago, you challenge your opponents' signatures and knock them off the ballot.

The Palmer race was one of the earliest clues that Obama's sincere critique about what's wrong with politics should not be mistaken for a declaration of unilateral disarmament when it comes to campaigning. He is not running a protest campaign like Jerry Brown's in 1992, or one under the delusion that it is above politics, like Bradley's. He is operating in the world as it is. When I asked Ron Davis if Obama is too idealistic, he laughed. "Barack knows how to play the game!" he told me. "I would hope we would not have a pie-in-the-sky type for president. These are not the times." Galluzzo concurred: "First of all, he's committed to his values. They are not bullshit to him. He personally believes the principles he's espousing. Now, do I also believe he's ambitious and will do whatever it takes to win? Yes."

Speaking of what he learned as an organizer, Obama himself told me, "I think that oftentimes ordinary citizens are taught that decisions are made based on the public interest or grand principles, when, in fact, what really moves things is money and votes and power."

After beating Palmer, Obama brought some of his old organizing lessons to Springfield. His successful career there owed much to a relationship he built with Emil Jones, the South Side machine pol whom Obama later described as his "political godfather." Jones was an improbable mentor for Obama: In the mid-'80s, Obama's group had organized protests against Jones when it wanted more help with funding for its projects. In *Dreams*, Obama portrayed Jones as an "old ward heeler" jockeying for position on a stage with the mayor. And Obama and Jones tangled over Alice Palmer, whom Jones had tried to rescue. Yet despite that history, or perhaps because of it, Obama sought out Jones in the legislature and let him know he was eager to work with him. Jones's mentoring frayed Obama's relationships with some other black colleagues—"petty jealousies," Jones told me—but it paved the way for all of Obama's legislative achievements.

"Emil was then, and is now, a powerhouse," Rudd told me. "One of the things that community organizing teaches you is to do something called power analysis. You have to understand how to have a relationship with people in power, to be a peer with them, not to go on your knees begging but understand yourself as a coequal and find a way that someone who has power will understand your power. That's the whole point of organizing: What is it that people in power need to accommodate your needs?"

In 2000, Obama challenged Representative Bobby Rush, a former Black Panther whose connection to black Chicago once seemed unshakable. But, after Rush tried and failed to dislodge Richard M. Daley from the mayor's office in 1999, Obama saw an opening. The contest proved particularly painful for him when his opponents picked at old wounds about his identity. Donne Trotter, another candidate and state Senate rival who resented Obama's meteoric rise, told *The Chicago Reader*, "Barack is viewed in part to be the white man in blackface in our community." But those accusations probably had more impact on Obama emotionally than they did on his poll numbers. A few months before the election, Rush's son was shot and killed during a robbery, creating a wave of sympathy that carried him to victory.

After his defeat, Obama doubled down on his efforts to secure Jones's patronage. "When he ran for the U.S. House and lost that race, he learned from that," Jones told me. "He recognized that, even though you feel it in yourself that you are the best person, you need others around you that can influence others in support of you—or

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Obama in 1990, shortly after being elected president of the Harvard Law Review.

keep some people from being obstructionists. You need people to open doors for you. I guess that's what he saw in me."

There was another door Obama thought Jones could open. When the Democrats took over the Illinois Senate in 2003, Obama paid Jones a visit. "After I was elected president, he came in to see me one day," Jones told me. "He said, 'You were just elected president. You have a lot of power now.' 'What kind of power do I have?' He said, 'You have the power to make a United States senator.' 'That sounds good. Do you have anybody in mind?' He said, 'Yeah, me.'"

Despite this history, Obama is still cast by the press as the candidate unwilling to stoop low enough to win, while Hillary is the machine politician whose last name has become synonymous with ruthlessness. But that David-versus-Goliath framing of the race is overstated. Obama's political team is seasoned and conventional. His media adviser and strategic guru, David Axelrod, has spent decades in Chicago politics working for both the reformers (Harold Washington) and the machine (Richard M. Daley). Obama has all of the political machinery—ad-makers, fund-raisers, opposition-researchers—in place to run a serious but traditional campaign.

Moreover, when Obama's ideals clash with reality, he has been able to find compromises that don't put him at a political disadvantage. For instance, no Democrat can win the general election while adhering to the public financing system if the Republican nominee doesn't do the same. Clinton and John Edwards have simply conceded that the public financing system is dead and are ignoring fund-raising restrictions that would be triggered if either ends up playing within the public financing scheme. Facing the same situation, Obama—a longtime champion of campaign finance reform in general and public financing in particular—asked the Federal Election Commission if he could raise the potentially restricted money now (the world as it is) but then give it back if he wins the nomination and convinces his Republican opponent to stick with public financing (the world as we would like it to be).

Back home in Chicago's recent mayoral election, Obama endorsed Richard M. Daley—the symbol of machine politics, corruption, and racism for Hyde Park progressives and Obama's old organizing friends. Asked if she was disappointed, Rudd said, "Yeah. We all want our politicians to be pure and ideological, but I think it was a strategic move on his part and a well-considered one." Another member of Obama's organizing fraternity told me, "That's part of his political savvy. … He recognizes that Daley is a powerful man and to have him as an ally is important. While he was a state senator here and moving around in Chicago, he made sure to minimize the direct confrontational approach to people of influence and policymakers and civic leaders. These are the same people now who are very aggressively supporting his campaign."

But when those supporters become a liability, Obama has not been afraid to take a direct, confrontational approach. Reverend Wright learned this recently, on the evening before he was scheduled to deliver the invocation at Obama's presidential announcement speech in Springfield. According to *The New York Times*, after Trinity's Afrocentrism—which had originally drawn Obama to the church in the 1980s—had become a sticky campaign issue, Obama called his old friend and told him it was probably best if the pastor didn't speak, after all. The following day, Wright could be seen silently watching the proceedings from the sidelines along with other Obama supporters.

The way that Obama and his team have responded to the opening skirmishes of the presidential race has also been telling. Every time Obama has been challenged this year, his campaign has responded with ferocity. When Fox News falsely reported that Obama attended a madrassa in Indonesia, his aides not only went into war-room mode, beating back the story—not that difficult, considering it was obviously untrue—but Robert Gibbs, Obama's communications director, also told Fox political reporter Carl Cameron that he wouldn't be allowed to travel on Obama's plane. *What is Fox going to do to us*, Gibbs asked Cameron, *report that Obama attended a radical Islamic school? Oh, wait, you already did that*!

When Australian Prime Minister John Howard said Obama's Iraq plan would embolden Al Qaeda, Obama delivered a rehearsed line to a room full of reporters about how Howard should send more Aussies to Iraq if he cares so much about the situation there. And, most famously, when the Clinton campaign called on Obama to distance himself from Geffen, his campaign shot back by referencing the Clintons' Lincoln Bedroom fund-raising scandal.

In our last conversation, a few days after the Geffen episode, I asked Obama if his reputation for purity is a little overblown. He chuckled. "I wouldn't be a U.S. senator or out of Chicago or a presidential candidate from Illinois if I didn't have some sense of the world as it actually works," he said. "When I arrived in Chicago at the age of twenty-four, I didn't know a single person in Chicago, and I know an awful lot of folks now. And so, obviously, some of that has to do with me being pretty clear-eyed about power."

But being clear-eyed about power also means understanding its limits.

"What I am constantly trying to do," he added, "is balance a hard head with a big heart." ◆

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Athwart History

How William F. Buckley turned against the war—and his own movement.

SAM TANENHAUS

Although he remains the most eminent conservative in the United States, his face and voice recognized by millions, William F. Buckley Jr. has all but retired from public life. At the apex of his influence, when Richard Nixon and, later, Ronald Reagan occupied the White House, Buckley received flattering notes on presidential letterhead and importuning phone calls from Cabinet members worried about their standing in the conservative movement. Since those heady times, Buckley has, piece by piece, dismantled the formidable apparatus through which he tirelessly promulgated conservative doctrine over the course of half a century. In 1998, he ended his frenetic schedule of public speeches (some 70 a year over the course of 40 years, he once estimated). In 1999, he taped the last segment of "Firing Line," the debate program begun in 1966 that invented TV punditry. And, in 2004, he relinquished his controlling stock ownership of *National Review*, the magazine he founded in 1955 and had continued to direct from behind the scenes even after yielding his place atop the masthead in 1988.

Buckley made these serial "divestitures" contentedly, even cheerfully. It left more time for other pursuits—writing novels, weekend sailing (he sold his 36-foot sloop, *Patito*, but sometimes traverses the Long Island Sound with its new owner, Roger Kimball, who co-edits *The New Criterion*), and music (he still plays Bach on the piano in his study and invites friends to his rambling weekend home in Stamford, Connecticut, to hear professional recitals on the harpsichord in his music room). In truth, Buckley has never been a wholeheartedly political creature and doesn't quite approve of politicians—not even his favorites. Of his disciples Barry Goldwater and Reagan, Buckley emphasizes, "They came to *me*." He once told me he discusses politics only when someone's paying him to do it.

Still, Buckley, now 81, likes to have his say and, for this reason, has held onto one outlet for regular political commentary: his syndicated column, "On the Right," which he has been writing since 1962. At its peak, the column ran in 300 dailies. Today, Buckley's most dedicated readers are the friends who receive e-mailed versions in advance, though even they, in some cases, may read him less avidly than before or wait to catch up with the selected columns reprinted in the back pages of *National Review*.

Or so it was, until George W. Bush invaded Iraq. The war that has unhinged so many has curiously revitalized Buckley, not as the administration's most eloquent defender but as perhaps its most forceful in-house critic. Untethered to the Bush team—the only insider he knew was Donald Rumsfeld, whom Buckley suggested should consider resigning following the Abu Ghraib scandal—he is also detached from its outer ring of ideologues and flacks. He is, instead, a party of one, who thinks and writes with newfound freedom. While others, left and right, have staked out positions and then fortified them, week after week, Buckley has been thinking his way through events as they have unfolded, looking for new angles of approach, new ways of understanding, drawing on his matchless knowledge of modern conservatism and on his 50-year immersion in the American political scene. It is one of those late-period efflorescences that major figures sometimes enjoy—and, in Buckley's case, it is marked by an unexpected austerity. Like Wallace Stevens's snow man, he has developed a "mind of winter" and, as he scans the bleak vista of the Iraq disaster, "beholds nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." And it has been instructive to observe.

One evening in late August 2002, I was at Buckley's home in Manhattan for one of the biweekly dinners he still holds for top *National Review* staff and occasional outsiders. At this point, it was clear to Buckley, and everyone else, that an invasion of Iraq was impending. As Buckley relaxed in his library during predinner cocktails, he talked about the speech Dick Cheney had given that morning at the annual national convention of the VFW in Nashville. Cheney had warned of Saddam Hussein's pursuit of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and declared that, "the risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action." Like most of the *National Review* contingent gathered that evening (and, indeed, much of the nation), Buckley was impressed. But, as others spoke confidently about victory, he was quiet—not disagreeing, but listening. He was also quiet, as I recall, when one guest, a *National Review* contributor, dismissed the perils of the postwar occupation, since the Middle East was already a mess and couldn't possibly get worse.

Over the next months, Buckley continued to watch and listen—and, ultimately, to succumb to the same doubts felt by so many others as the war spun along its disastrous parabola. A year into the campaign, Buckley wrote that we had gone to Iraq "in order to eliminate any capacity to make weapons of mass destruction, and in order to export the blessings of democracy. But we have not succeeded." Later, he was appalled by the injustice of Guantánamo and shocked by the revelations about Abu Ghraib, an episode whose "sheer sadism, pleasure taken from torture" Buckley deemed worse than the My Lai massacre of civilians. By July 2004, Buckley had had enough and issued a John Edwards–like mea culpa: If "I had known back then in February 2003 what we know now I would not have counseled war against Iraq." He shrugged off the knowledge that some would consider him "disloyal" and that he had provided fodder for the Democrats in the November election. Two months ago, Buck-

ROBERT EDWARDS/DRAWN & QUARTERED

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ley wrote that, if he held a seat in the House of Representatives, he would vote against Bush's proposed troop surge.

In one sense, there is nothing extraordinary about Buckley's opinions on Iraq: They echo, after all, what most Americans have come to believe. But this is in itself remarkable, for Buckley has been identified for most of his long career with the ideological right, at times with its most strident factions. Yet he has also been a pragmatist and has often recalculated his thinking as events have required. His first taste of politics came almost seven decades ago, during the prelude to World War II. The Buckleys, like their counterparts the Kennedys, were stoutly isolationist: Buckley's mother wore an America First Committee (AFC) pin, and his older brother James, later an American senator, belonged to the AFC chapter at Yale. The 15-year-old Buckley was in the audience at Madison Square Garden on the night his first political hero, Charles Lindbergh, made his final major antiwar speech before Pearl Harbor.

After the attack six weeks later the AFC disbanded instantly; Buckley, like his two older brothers, served in the military. Still, he remained skeptical of Franklin Roosevelt and of the war's aims. In his first appearance in a national publication, a letter printed in *Time* magazine just after V-J day, Buckley, then a 19-year-old Army lieutenant, wrote, "Few Quixotes still proclaim that this war is being fought for ideals." He had in mind the alliance, corrupt in his view, with the Soviet Union. "Christianity and Communism are irreconcilable in the same way that as Americans we believe that totalitarianism and democracy are incompatible," he continued. Nonetheless, he added that he, and all Catholics, could "heartily ratify the action of our Government in joining hands with a state, no matter what color its banner, if such a union will further our aim of beating Japan." Sixty years later, that ideological flexibility is intact, as Buckley has faulted Bush for trying to go it alone in Iraq and chided neoconservatives who "simply overate the reach of U.S. power and influence."

To some extent, this is merely the judgment of a "realist hawk." But Buckley's caution is also rooted in cosmopolitanism. (So was Lindbergh's: He was, after all, the man who bound the continents together with his historic flight and was greeted as a hero when he landed in Paris.) And, for all his patriotism, Buckley is indifferent to American exceptionalism. Indeed, he is probably the most worldly American conservative since George Santayana and has a similar attachment to Spanish culture. "Bill's not a conservative," his onetime ally Karl Hess once said. "He's a Spanish A-ristocrat!" This exaggerates only a little. Buckley's father, Will, a Texas entrepreneur, made a fortune in the oil fields of Mexico's "gold coast" and planned to raise the family there until he was expelled following the revolutionary spasms of 1913–1921. But the allure remained. Buckley and his siblings visited Mexico for months at a time and also lived for periods in Paris and London. Buckley's first language was Spanish, which he learned from household servants. He did not speak English easily until he was seven or eight. His famous prose style, with its ornate syntax and rococo vocabulary, conveys, at times, a subtle hint of "foreignness," like that of his friend Vladimir Nabokov.

To this day, Buckley's politics are grounded less in democratic values—"Democracy just doesn't work, much of the time," he observed in a 2004 column—than in the twin virtues of Catholicism and capitalism, in that order. Broadly tolerant, Buckley extirpated anti-Semitism from the postwar conservative movement in the 1950s and has since jokingly proposed that Israel be made the fifty-first state. But he closely guards his faith and its doctrinal purity. In its first years, *National Review* had so many Catholic staff and contributors that it was widely assumed to be a semi-official religious publication, a conservative counterpart to *Commonweal*. Gradually, it became less Catholic than "Christian." But that was the limit of Buckley's ecumenicalism. In 1997, when he was scouring the ranks of talented younger conservatives to find a new editor for *National Review*, Buckley eliminated one prospect, his onetime protégé David Brooks, a rising star at *The Weekly Standard*. In a memo to board members, Buckley reported that he had discussed Brooks with *NR* alum George Will: "I said that I thought it would be wrong for the next editor to be other than a believing Christian. He agreed and added that the next editor should not be a Canadian"—a possible reference to conservative writer David Frum.

All this adds up to a conservatism premised on firm principle and opportune adjustment alike, a dialectic impressed upon Buckley by two of his early mentors, James Burnham and Whittaker Chambers, both ex-Communists with well-developed aversions to strict party lines. When conservatism emerged from the wilderness in the 1960s, it was Buckley who insisted its elected tribunes be given room to operate outside the strictures of "the movement." In 1967, he defended the right's brightest star, Ronald Reagan, who, as governor of California, had enlarged, rather than slashed, the state's budget. Buckley calmly spelled out the reasons and concluded his case by quoting Chambers: "A conservatism that cannot find room in its folds for the actualities is a conservatism that is not a political force, or even a twitch: it has become a literary whimsy." The next year, when Richard Nixon was in need of a strong foreign policy brain, Buckley found for him not the ideologue one would have expected, but the realist Henry Kissinger. This despite the fact that Kissinger's first patron, Nelson Rockefeller, was loathed by the Republican right and by Buckley in particular. Why Kissinger? Because Buckley admired his intellect.

This calm reckoning of political reality informs Buckley's critique of the current administration, particularly its unwise revival, after September 11, of the "rollback" strategy formulated in the 1950s by conservatives who thought the Soviet "containment" policies of Harry S Truman too timid. Buckley knows everything about rollback. Its first theorist was Burnham, who espoused its principles in *National Review*. President Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, practiced a version of it called "brinkmanship." But, ultimately, it was dropped amid the wreckage of Vietnam. By 1969, Buckley was already referring, in antiquarian terms, to the "evangelistic" anti-communism of "the old conservatives," with their "talk, even, of rolling back the Iron Curtain—the liberation rhetoric of the early fifties." This liberation rhetoric was dusted off by neoconservatives and formed the basis of the "Bush doctrine," with its emphasis on preemptive war and its mandate to "take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge," as Bush explained at West Point in 2002. Today, Buckley says, Bush "should have taken an early opportunity to pull away from rollback."

But Buckley recognizes that cold war analogies of any kind are dubious. For one thing, in the age of terrorism, the "enemy" is not so easily classified or even

Sam Tanenhaus is the editor of The New York Times Book Review. His book, An Un-American Life: The Case of Whittaker Chambers, has just been published in England.

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identified. "Individual terrorists were, only yesterday, engaged in ordinary occupations, shocking friends and family when they struck as terrorists," Buckley wrote in August 2005. By this time, he had already uncovered another, more useful parallel. In October 2004, a week before Election Day, he presciently exhumed in his column a half-forgotten 1978 book, *A Savage War of Peace*, the classic account of the Algerian war written by Alistair Horne, the British historian who is one of Buckley's oldest friends (the two were boarding school roommates in the early '40s). What made the book "hideously relevant to our present problems in Iraq," Buckley explained, was its description of how the French, trapped in a bloody debacle that dragged on for eight years, were losing to "a factionalist-nationalist movement using terrorism as a means of expressing contempt and hatred for modern forms." At last, in 1962, President Charles de Gaulle "surveyed that mess" and "unconditionally surrendered" rather than risk the only, and unthinkable, alternative—a massive military attack. The United States now faced the identical problem and was similarly hamstrung, because, as Buckley warned both Bush and John Kerry, "the insurrectionists can't be defeated by any means we would consent to use." Six months later, Bush's inner circle, and Bush himself, would claim to be studying Horne's book—though, earlier this year, Horne told Maureen Dowd that, when he had given a copy of his book to Rumsfeld with passages on torture underlined, he had received a "savage letter" in return.

Buckley, sharing a cocktail with actor David Niven, and prowling the grounds of his Stamford home during his 1965 candidacy for mayor of New York.

Buckley perhaps differs most strikingly from others on the right in what he hasn't said: Specifically, he has not denounced Bush's liberal critics. *Commentary* has seriously proposed that the editors of *The New York Times* committed treason by publishing reports on the Bush administration's domestic surveillance program; Dinesh D'Souza, in his new reductio ad absurdum, *The Enemy at Home*, consciously summons up the ghost of Joe McCarthy by proffering lists of "domestic insurgents"—they include Hillary Clinton, Edward Kennedy, and Martha Nussbaum—who "want bin Laden to win and Bush to lose the war" on terrorism. But Buckley, with his memories of the AFC, knows the difference between dissent and disloyalty. (He is succinct on D'Souza's book: "I haven't read it and I reject its thesis.")

Beyond this, Buckley recognizes, as Bush's defenders have not, that the trouble originates with the Iraq war, not with its opponents. When I asked him recently if Iraq is the Republicans' Vietnam, he said, "Absolutely." It is a serious admission for one who knows that Vietnam destroyed cold war liberalism and, with it, the Democratic Party's control of national politics. Iraq now threatens the right and the GOP, Buckley says, with the "identical" fate. No wonder, then, that in a July interview with CBS News, he said that if Bush were the leader of a parliamentary government "it would be expected that he would retire or resign." He has been somewhat kinder to Dick Cheney, whom he characterized in an interview last year not as a liar but as a dupe, who had "believed the business about the weapons of mass destruction" and then thundered forth so confidently on it. If, by contrast, Cheney *knowingly* misrepresented the facts, Buckley has privately acknowledged, Bush would be a candidate for impeachment.

In 2004, when I had lunch with Buckley at a French restaurant a few miles from his house in Stamford, I asked him what exactly made Bush a conservative. He pondered for a moment, then said, "Well, he's a patriot and he believes in God." By this definition, of course, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton would qualify as conservatives, too. Then again, it's never been entirely clear to Buckley just what constitutes an American conservative. "I confess that I know who is a conservative less surely than I know who is a liberal," he wrote in 1970. "Blindfold me, spin me about like a top, and I will walk up to the single liberal in the room without zig or zag and find him even if he is hiding behind a flower pot. I am tempted to try to develop an equally sure nose for the conservative, but I am deterred by the knowledge that conservatives, under the stress of our times, have had to invite all kinds of people into their ranks to help with the job at hand."

Buckley, a paragon of courtesy, will not say so, but I suspect he questions today the wisdom of having opened the gates quite so wide. For now, in the winter of his discontent, and from his perch above the partisan fray, he is watching the disintegration of the movement that has dominated U.S. politics for the past quarter-century—the movement Buckley did so much, perhaps more than anyone else, to create. ◆

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Jimmy Carter, Israel and the Jews

Is our former President ignorant, malevolent – or both?

Jimmy Carter, our 39th president, has just written a book in which he purports to clarify the causes of the unending Israel-Arab conflict. The title of the book shows the bias that permeates it: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. It is a scurrilous comparison with the oppression of the black majority in South Africa. The entire book is shot through with falsehoods, distortions, and omissions of facts

What are the facts?

There are so many falsehoods in the book that it isn't easy to know where to begin. But here are just a few of the many distortions in it.

• Yasser Arafat, the "leader" of the Palestinians for decades, was the man responsible for many murders that he had personally authorized. Hafez-al-Assad, the former tyrant of Syria, was also a mass murderer, personally responsible for the killing of at least 25,000 in the Syrian city of Hama. Both are described as leaders who diligently sought peace with Israel. Mr. Carter knows better, of course.

• Mr. Carter asserts that peace would have descended on Israel/Palestine if the Israelis had not "colonized" Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). But that is quite incorrect. In the first place, the term "colonization" is not applicable. It presupposes that Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") is Palestinian territory, which those aggressive Israeli Jews have usurped. Not so, of course! Jews have had a presence in the area since time immemorial and certainly have at least the same rights to live there as the Arabs. It was never "Palestinian" land. So there can't have been any "colonization." Mr. Carter knows that, of course.

> "It is...not likely that the lies, misstatements, and omissions in his book are the result of ignorance. They must be the result, therefore, of malevolence – ..."

• Mr. Carter makes a great to-do about the "apartheid wall that snakes through of what is left of the West Bank." The purpose of this "wall," which is really a fence over most of its course, is to safeguard the Israeli populace from the marauding murder gangs that have terrorized Israel for years and have caused hundreds of victims. The fence has successfully done that. Mr. Carter knows that, of course.

• Mr. Carter focuses on Security Council Resolution No. 242, which calls for return of captured territories in exchange for peace, recognition, and secure boundaries. Nowhere does he mention that Israel accepted the Resolution and has fully complied with it. While not having returned *all* of those territories (the Resolution did not call for that), it has returned all of Gaza and, more important, the vast Sinai, with its strategic passes, its strategic port, its strategic expanse of a huge buffer zone, and the oil fields that Israel had developed. They yield over $1 billion in revenues per year, which would have made Israel independent of petroleum imports for the foreseeable future. And he does not mention that the Arab nations rejected Resolution 242 out of hand and instead issued their famous "three no's:" No peace, no recognition, and no negotiation with Israel. Mr. Carter knows that, of course.

• Mr. Carter blames Israelis for their lack of effort to compose their interminable differences with the Palestinians. But that is an outrageous lie. The Israelis have almost compulsively tried, time and time again, to find a solution to this never-ending problem. All of their efforts have faltered because of the racist and theocratic hatred that the Palestinians and Muslims have against the Jews, a hatred that nothing seems to assuage. One of the last memorable such efforts was in the last year of President Clinton's presidency, when he met with Mr. Arafat and with Ehud Barak, then prime minister of Israel. Mr. Barak declared his willingness to turn over 95% of the "West Bank" and the Arab quarter of Jerusalem to the Palestinians and to financial compensation to the "refugees." He did balk at allowing *all* of those so-called refugees – now miraculously swollen from the original 600,000 to 5 million – to "return" to Israel. It would (as intended) have meant the end of the Jewish state. Mr. Arafat left in a huff and started his second intifada, which has killed and maimed thousands on both sides. Mr. Carter knows that, of course.

• Space does not permit to give more examples of the lies, and omissions in Mr. Carter's malicious book. But there are certainly many, beginning with his not mentioning that in 1947 the United Nations advocated a division of the country into a Jewish and an Arab sector, with Jerusalem being internationalized. The Jews accepted that compromise; the Arabs rejected it and instead invaded Israel with five national armies. He does not mention that the largest contingent of Israelis are Jews expelled or forced to flee from their Arab home countries, where they had been living for centuries. Mr. Carter knows all of that, of course.

Mr. Carter was certainly one of our most ineffective presidents, comparable perhaps to Fillmore, Polk or Harding. But he was probably one of the most intelligent. It is therefore not likely that the lies, misstatements, and omissions in his book are the result of ignorance. They must be the result, therefore, of malevolence – against Israel and against the Jews.

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This American Lie

A midget guitar teacher, a Macy's elf, and the truth about David Sedaris.

ALEX HEARD

"The events described in these stories are real," humorist David Sedaris wrote in the introductory note to *Naked*, his 1997 collection of nonfiction essays. *The New York Times* was convinced: When *Naked* hit the best-seller list, it categorized the book as nonfiction. The Library of Congress called it biography, and Sedaris assured several interviewers over the years that the book was essentially factual. "Everything in *Naked* was true," he told the webzine *GettingIt* in 1999. "I mean, I exaggerate. But all the situations were true."

Great. Except that some things in *Naked* aren't true, even if you allow for an extra-wiggly definition of "exaggerate." Start with the story called "Dix Hill," in which David is a 13-year-old on summer vacation in 1970. His acerbic (and now deceased) mom, Sharon Sedaris, decrees that he has to volunteer for a job somewhere. Since David is an eerie little guy, he casts his gaze toward the state mental hospital on the south side of his hometown, Raleigh, North Carolina. "Dorothea Dix Sanitarium," Sedaris informs us, was a bizarre madhouse marked by "a bleak colony of Gothic buildings" and trees whose limbs "resembled the palsied fingers of mad scientists tapping against the windows in search of fresh brains."

That's funny, but what comes next isn't meant as a joke; you're supposed to think it really happened. David toddles into the mental hospital and tells a receptionist he's reporting for duty. She answers in screwball-comedy dialogue—"Tell me, son, are you by any chance a current resident?"—but allows him in anyway. With no training at all, he's sent off to work with a "plum-colored" African American orderly fake-named Clarence Poole. Shortly, they're in action, yanking an insane old lady off her bed and strapping her to a gurney:

> "I'll take her up top and you get the feet," [Clarence] said. "Come on, granny, you're going for a ride." When the sheet was lifted, I was shocked to discover that this woman was naked. I had never before seen a naked woman and hesitated just long enough for her to lurch forward and sink her remaining three teeth into my forearm.

Wow. Call me a skeptic, but that didn't sound likely. So I made some calls, working through a few baffled state employees until I found Margaret Raynor, a 62-year-old registered nurse who has worked at Dix since 1969. Raynor had never read "Dix Hill" before. I faxed her a copy and then phoned. What did she think?

Alex Gross

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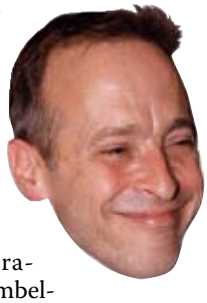
"He's lying through his teeth!" she said—loudly—before schooling me on the more obvious factual errors. There's no Gothic anything on Dix Hill. The main building, McBryde, is a huge, wide Tuscan Revival structure slathered with stucco. The facility is called Dorothea Dix Hospital, not "sanitarium." There are big trees on the grounds, and there was a volunteer program back in the early '70s. But it was carefully organized, a fact I absorbed when I visited Dix recently, met Raynor, and leafed through a scrapbook kept in the hospital library.

Judging by old newspaper clips, Dix was no paradise: In 1972, all of North Carolina's mental hospitals were officially rebuked because of substandard conditions. And there was, evidently, an organized role for young volunteers, including a 16-year-old named Bonnie Brunson who was featured in a 1973 story in the Raleigh *News and Observer*. But her duties—"being with the patients, escorting them to special events, writing letters for them"—sounded awfully light compared with Sedaris's battlefront tales.

Even so, in the end, I decided Kid Sedaris probably did volunteer at Dix. Why? Because I called him and asked. He says he did, and I believe him. During a long conversation from his temporary roost in Tokyo—where he has been holed up trying to quit smoking, poor guy—Sedaris was admirably open to fielding my most obnoxious questions about the hard-to-believe things I had found in some of his stories. He admitted that he had pumped up the Dix episode to tell a funnier yarn and that the juicy details with Clarence didn't take place.



That seems beyond the boundaries of comic exaggeration. It's fine to use absurdly embellished descriptions for laughs—this is an essential tool for any humorist. If I write, "I was so hungover, I threw up my own skeleton," you know I'm kidding. It's not fine to pretend—in a long and detailed scene—that you performed outlandish, dangerous tasks at a mental hospital when you didn't.

And Sedaris definitely didn't. When I asked him about his duties at Dix, he said, in that gentle voice so many people know and love, "It would have been more like helping set up parties." That cleared it up. Everything in *Naked* was true, except for the parts that weren't.

Alex Heard is the editorial director of Outside *magazine.*

At this point, I can almost hear throngs of NPR listeners saying, *Uh oh, is this guy about to give my man Sedaris the James Frey treatment?*

No. I do think Sedaris exaggerates too much for a writer using the nonfiction label. And after spending several weeks fact-checking four of his books—*Barrel Fever* (1994), *Naked* (1997), *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2000), and *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2004)—I'd recommend that he issue Oprah Moment apologies to a few people, including all the unclothed frolickers at the Empire Haven nudist camp in the summer of 1996; platoons of women who are stereotyped as harpies, hicks, or sluts; and the ghost of his mom, who usually was one-dimensionalized into a sarcasm-dispensing cliché.

On the plus side, I was a fan when I started my odd little project, and I still am—mostly. One benefit of studying Sedaris's work is that I learned more about him, and there's plenty to like. He's an outstanding comic stylist who is consistently entertaining (his 2006 Princeton graduation speech, published in *The New Yorker* last year, is one of the funniest things I've ever read), and he seems to be getting better with age.

As a magazine editor and writer, I also admire his work ethic. I edited him once at *The New York Times Magazine*—a short piece about why he loved the TV show "COPS"—and he was a real pro. That's when I first became aware of Sedaris's improbable (but true) backstory, which involves an amazing mid-thirties turn-around that only could have happened through discipline. Between the time he dropped out of college in 1977 and became a big name some 15 years later, Sedaris paid serious dues—performing manual labor as a housecleaner and mover, battling drug addiction, diligently filling up journals that became the basis for his later work, and giving college another try, when, starting in the mid-'80s, he studied creative writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The hallelujah moment came during the 1992 holiday season, when Sedaris read a nonfiction piece on NPR called "SantaLand Diaries," which recounted his experiences working as an elf at Macy's Santaland. (Yes, he really was employed at Santaland. Bob Rutan, a Macy's executive who worked there when Sedaris was around, remembers him as "an outstanding elf.") Book publishers came calling, and Sedaris started churning out the pieces for NPR's "This American Life," *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *The New Yorker* that eventually made him famous.

As fans know, the stories are largely autobiographical and often concern funny occurrences from his years as an odd-jobs desperado. His other great subject is his family—the daily doings of Sharon, his dad Lou, and the sibling Brat Pack of Lisa, Gretchen, Amy (now a prominent comedian and author in her own right), Tiffany, and Paul. David's persona is Weird Little Gay Guy who grows up into a catty-but-caring adult. Though he's mellowed over time—*Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* is a gentler book than *Naked*—he's not shy about letting everybody in his family have it, including himself.

It's all pretty funny, but, like many readers, I've often wondered if, as advertised, it's all true. The family stories, for the most part, never struck me as that hard to believe—the Sedaris kids seem a little tame, frankly—but every now and then, especially in *Naked* and *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, you come across something that sounds like a whopper flopping on the deck.

Over the years, as I watched other nonfiction writers go down in flames—Frey, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, the "monkeyfishing" guy at *Slate*—I wondered why no one had checked on America's favorite nonfiction imp. So I decided to do it myself. The trail was long and fascinating, and it led me to a larger question: whether "nonfiction" means anything when you're talking about humor writers who admit to flubberizing the truth for comic effect.

Sedaris doesn't appear to think so, and he certainly doesn't see himself as a journalist. In interviews, he's groaned about the time *Esquire* sent him to cover life at a morgue in Phoenix. The problem: He had to restrict himself to what actually happened. "I couldn't exaggerate at all," he told an interviewer. "It gave me a whole new appreciation for people who can honestly tell the truth, because people just didn't always say what I wanted them to." For Sedaris, it's all about telling "good stories." During our conversation, he told me he wouldn't care a bit if he found out that Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* was written by "some guy in Montana who made the whole thing up," because the tale he spins is so beautiful.

OK, but last time I checked, you're supposed to call that fiction. Sedaris hon-

(FROM LEFT) GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT/BRYAN BEDDER; GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT/SCOTT GRIES; GETTY IMAGES NEWS/CHRIS HONDROS

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estly doesn't see the difference, and his audience isn't complaining. Should that be good enough for the rest of us?

To answer that question, I first had to try to figure out what is untrue in Sedaris's books. My method consisted of sniff-testing the oeuvre, looking for stories that seemed checkable (many aren't), and launching a fleet of e-mails and idiotic-sounding cold-calls to dig deeper.

In the initial stages—after my early score with "Dix Hill"—I was surprised to find that some of the weirder billboard events checked out. When Sedaris was at college at Kent State in 1976–1977, he really did hitchhike from Ohio to North Carolina with a girl in a wheelchair (as described in "The Incomplete Quad," from *Naked*). His account of Raleigh community-theater peccadilloes circa 1972 ("The Drama Bug," *Naked*) was an accurate smackdown. And, though I had limited success checking the family stories—everybody but David, Lou, and Tiffany declined to talk to me—there was apparently an episode in which an unidentified family member smeared human feces on the household bath towels ("True Detective," *Naked*).

But some stories collapsed like a shaky Jenga tower, including the first two selections in Sedaris's fourth book, *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. They both contain outright fabrications, and the fabrications matter. Indeed, if Sedaris hadn't made up significant events and dialogue in these pieces, he wouldn't have had "nonfiction" stories to tell.

In "Giant Dreams, Midget Abilities," David is twelve, and his dad, Lou—an IBM engineer and grumpy Greek who is usually depicted as a tightwad and a stiff—forces him to take guitar lessons from a teacher at a shopping mall near their home in north Raleigh. The teacher is a "perfectly formed midget" whom Sedaris fake-names "Mister Mancini."

Sedaris once told an interviewer he exaggerates people "up," making them better than they are. That's hard to see in Mancini's case. Sedaris describes him as a badly dressed cornball with a "high and strange" voice. Kids in the mall razz him ("Go back to Oz, munchkin"), but, lest you feel too sympathetic, Mancini's own deeds condemn him to scorn. He's a lecher (he tells David he should name his guitar after a sexy babe) and a homophobe. The story climaxes when David, hoping to show Mancini what he *really* wants to do, tries out his new cabaret act, in which he imitates Billie Holiday singing the Oscar Mayer bologna jingle. Mancini freaks out: "'Hey, guy,' he said. 'You can hold it right there. I'm not into that scene. ... There were plenty of screwballs like you back in Atlanta, but me, I don't swing that way—you got it?'"

Get it? Mancini thinks David wants to eat his bologna. It's not funny, and, if you tried this in a work of fiction, your audience might boo. Oh, wait, Sedaris did try this in a work of fiction: The Mancini character, this time named "Mr. Chatam," appears in a *Barrel Fever* piece, clearly labeled fiction, called "My Manuscript." (In *Barrel Fever*, unlike in subsequent books, a clear distinction was made between fiction and nonfiction stories.) Chatam didn't make much of an impression on critics, but Mancini sure did. Reviewers took the story as fact, and they extracted meaningful content from this overblown midget joke. "No doubt the teacher's response embarrassed him," J. Peder Zane wrote in a *News and Observer* overview of Sedaris's work, "but that is not the central point, which is tolerance—the notion that when you look under the hood, we're all a little strange." In an *LA Weekly* review, the hardworking nonfiction humorist Henry Alford opined, "We feel for the child Sedaris even as we laugh with him, and if our sympathy ... is rooted in the fact that a boy is being ostracized for being gay, the overall effect is not at all one of politically correct cant."

Too bad none of it happened. Well, one thing happened. Sedaris did briefly take guitar lessons from a little person, but he made up Mancini's style, quirks, and speeches, and he invented the moment when Mancini thought young David was making a pass at him. Sedaris admitted as much during our interview, but I already felt sure of it, because I'd found a man who, like Sedaris, took guitar lessons from Mancini when he was a child.

The former student is 49-year-old L.M. (Sam) Hawkins, and he seems quite credible. He works on the Executive Security Branch of the Kentucky State Police, which means he protects Governor Ernie Fletcher and his wife, Glenna. The teacher's name was George Sage, and, though I was unable to locate Sage, alive or dead, Hawkins says he was an excellent instructor. The lessons worked: To this day, Hawkins makes extra money playing jazz guitar on the side, and Sedaris's depiction of his old mentor bothers him. "My recollections of the character represented as Mr. Mancini are not the same as David Sedaris's," he says. "George Sage was a very serious-minded guitar teacher. I am indebted to him, because, without his patience with me as a student, guitar would not be the integral part of my life that it is today."

The same thing happens in "Go Carolina," a story in which fifth-grade David is drafted into a speech-therapy class because he lisps. Sedaris would have you believe that, by this time, he was already flamboyantly gay and that only he and similarly fey lads were compelled to take speech therapy. "None of the therapy students were girls," he writes. "They were all boys like me who kept movie star scrapbooks and made their own curtains."

Things didn't unfold that way. Sedaris told me so, as did his old principal at Brooks Elementary School, a retired Raleigh educator named John Mallette. Mallette wasn't angry after reading the story (which I faxed), just confused. "I don't understand why he thinks we would make decisions about a speech class based on such factors," he said. "I'm sorry it seemed that way to him."

You'll notice that all three examples thus far involve Little David, but a story like "Naked" (which Sedaris reported when he was 39) can be just as flimsy. Indeed, though the story's subject matter is trivial, "Naked" reveals patterns that appear throughout the book, making all of *Naked* seem iffy. The problem is the dialogue. Sedaris has never denied putting words in people's mouths ("I exaggerate wildly, for the sake of the story. Mostly in dialogue," he once told the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*) but nobody bothers to ask the crucial follow-up: Do the phony speeches create a distortion?

They do in "Naked." Though Sedaris doesn't name the nudist camp he visited or say what state it was in, it was Empire Haven, a woodsy retreat in the Finger Lakes region of New York. After a long, grueling quest, I located Empire Haven's coowner, a woman named Marleen Robinson, as well as a longtime regular named Morley Schloss. They said Sedaris's take barely resembled the camp they know, and Schloss was particularly offended by Sedaris's stereotyping of nudists as cranks and freaks. Robinson was able to identify the man behind a "Naked" character named Dusty, whose comic function is to ridicule Sedaris about his citified ways. "Oh," Dusty sputters at one point, "you're all just so sophisticated sitting in your little cafés and looking up at the Empire State Building while the rest of us lie around in haystacks smoking our corncob pipes."

"The person he's talking about doesn't have a hostile bone in his body," Marleen

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told me. "It's very embellished." It also sounds contrived. Sedaris is credited with having an impeccable ear for American slang, but his characters' speeches often seem too good to be true. Once they start reverberating inside your head, you realize he's pushing different pedals on the same instrument: the Sharon Sedaris grump organ, turned up to eleven.

Here's a woman on a bus ride from North Carolina to Oregon, hollering about her baby's shiftless father: "I said, 'I got a good mind to call him Cecil Fucking Fuckwad, after his daddy, you ugly fucking fuckwad.'"

And here's Sharon Sedaris, over drinks, discussing David's nervous tics with his teacher from school: "I know exactly what you're talking about. The eyes rolling every which way, it's like talking to a slot machine. Hopefully, one day he'll pay off, but until then, what do you say we have ourselves another glass of wine?"

As Sedaris told me, the Dusty quote is partly fabricated and the other two are made up. So what? Well, it's one thing for a humorist to recreate dialogue that captures the general spirit of how a conversation unfolded. It's another to manufacture lines like a playwright, a technique that lets you sidestep a problem that hobbles nonfiction writers all the time: Often, nothing interesting happens when you report a story. But that's exactly what Sedaris does. When reality sags, he opens the funny-dialogue nozzle. Sometimes in *Naked*, these rants aren't just the glue holding his stories together; they *are* the story.

No, I'm not equating him with Frey or Blair or Glass. Though his treatment of George Sage is inexcusable, most of his crimes are petty, making him a nonfiction juvenile delinquent rather than a frogwalk-worthy felon. Still, his work is marketed as nonfiction, and there's a simple rule associated with that: Don't make things up.

I imagine Sedaris's defenders would argue that, since it's just humor, none of this is a big deal. But humor is powerful stuff—in Glass's fabrications, the faked humor was often the only thing his stories had going for them—and writers reap tangible rewards when they present their humor as nonfiction. Things that seem stupid as fiction somehow seem hilarious if they're perceived to be real. You see this at work with Sedaris's dueling midgets. Chatam, the fictional one, is contrived and lame. But Mancini, the "real" character, struck readers as comical and deeply moving.

Whether Sedaris understands the difference between fiction and nonfiction is moot at this point—he could label his next book "hallucinations" and it would sell—but the principle still matters. The editors and radio producers who packaged Sedaris's earlier work certainly understood the difference. They knew that, in our time, nonfiction is bankable in ways that fiction is not. What bugs me is that they milked the term for all its value, while laughing off any of the ethical requirements it entails.

Last month, I flew to Raleigh to conduct a few final interviews in person, including one with 83-year-old Lou Sedaris inside the famous family homestead. Lou wasn't keen on seeing me because I had bluntly informed him, in a letter, that I was interested in whether David's exaggerations about family members ever amounted to fiction and whether this had caused any problems. That went over less than well—"I'm not sure I like your agenda," he said when I called the first time—so hats off to Lou for granting me an audience. Most of the kids went into a defensive crouch when they got the word. "You've got everybody all upset," Lou told me.

Sorry, guys, but it's not like I invented either of these questions. They've come up before, and they should, because David plays hardball. Among other things, he has written about his sister Lisa getting her first period on a golf course, depicted Tiffany as a problem child and slob adult, and told us more than we need to know about Paul training his dog to eat another dog's poop. Not surprisingly, the occasional spark has crackled, with Lou once telling the Raleigh paper, "They're really being invaded, you know, when he writes about them," and Tiffany, a Boston-area artist who makes beautiful mosaics, telling *The Boston Globe* in 2004, "I don't trust David to have boundaries. Our friends, our shrinks, the guy who gives us our meds—they all think David is incredibly violating."

These days, Tiffany seems more at peace, although she'd like the wider world to get the message that David sometimes exaggerates the family for comic effect. "I don't walk around my house in my bare feet, stamping out cigarettes," she says, referring to "Put a Lid On It," a story from *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* in which David visits her home and doesn't like what he sees. What struck me about Tiffany-the-character versus Tiffany-the-person is that Sedaris mined her for laughs but left out the best parts—how funny she is in her own right, and how talented and tough.

For his part, Lou was diplomatic when I visited him at the tree-shaded family rambler in Raleigh. A small man with a friendly face, he showed me around the upstairs portion of his home while jazz played on the stereo. We looked at his art collection, which is gloomy, and his own amateur paintings, which are not, and I felt the distant vibe of a household where creativity blossomed in an unlikely setting.

Lou takes hard hits in the stories but seems unscarred. He wasn't happy with the way David depicted his late mother, Ya Ya—that is, as a senile kook who supposedly kneaded bread on the kitchen floor—but, after years of reeducation by the kids ("They kept telling me, 'It's funny, Dad, it's all right'"), he gets it, and he echoed David about the fiction-nonfiction divide: It's a story, it's funny—so what's the problem?

It turned out that my most memorable Raleigh interview was with a family friend—a woman named Elizabeth Currence Cochran, better known as Libby Currence when she, like David, graduated from Raleigh's Sanderson High School in 1975. Libby is a sweetheart, and she made young David sound like a memorable guy. They were in high-school plays together, and, for a couple of years, they were very close. Not quite boyfriend and girlfriend close—that wasn't in the cards—but, for Libby, there was real love involved, and painful heartbreak when their intense platonic friendship finally came to an end.

Libby describes a friend who was funny and caring, and who had a soft spot for outcasts. She thinks the depiction of Sharon in David's "novels" (her term) is entertaining but a little off, because Sharon, far from being the full-time grouch of David's stories, was a capable mother. "The sarcasm is a little bit her," Libby said. "But she was nurturing, she was warm, she cooked dinner every night. I thought she was a *marvelous* woman."

David wrote Libby a number of letters from college, and you can see his funny style taking shape. But the one that caught my eye wasn't funny. In the fall of 1976, during his year at Kent State, Sedaris went on some sort of field trip to the Apple Creek State Institute, a facility for the mentally retarded in Apple Creek, Ohio. There, he saw terrible things that sound like the raw material for his fabricated scene in "Dix Hill." "We went to a ward with terribly afflicted children," he wrote Libby. "Children lying naked [on] the floor with shit and mucus in their hair and hands. ... It made me sick. These kids will never leave the hospital. ... Nobody even visits them."

Strange. In real life, young David felt more sympathy for mental patients than he would later display in *Naked*. I guess being mean was funnier. Libby and I talked about this tendency, and she said, "David probably sidestepped intimacy with humor." That's cool by me. Just don't call it nonfiction. ◆

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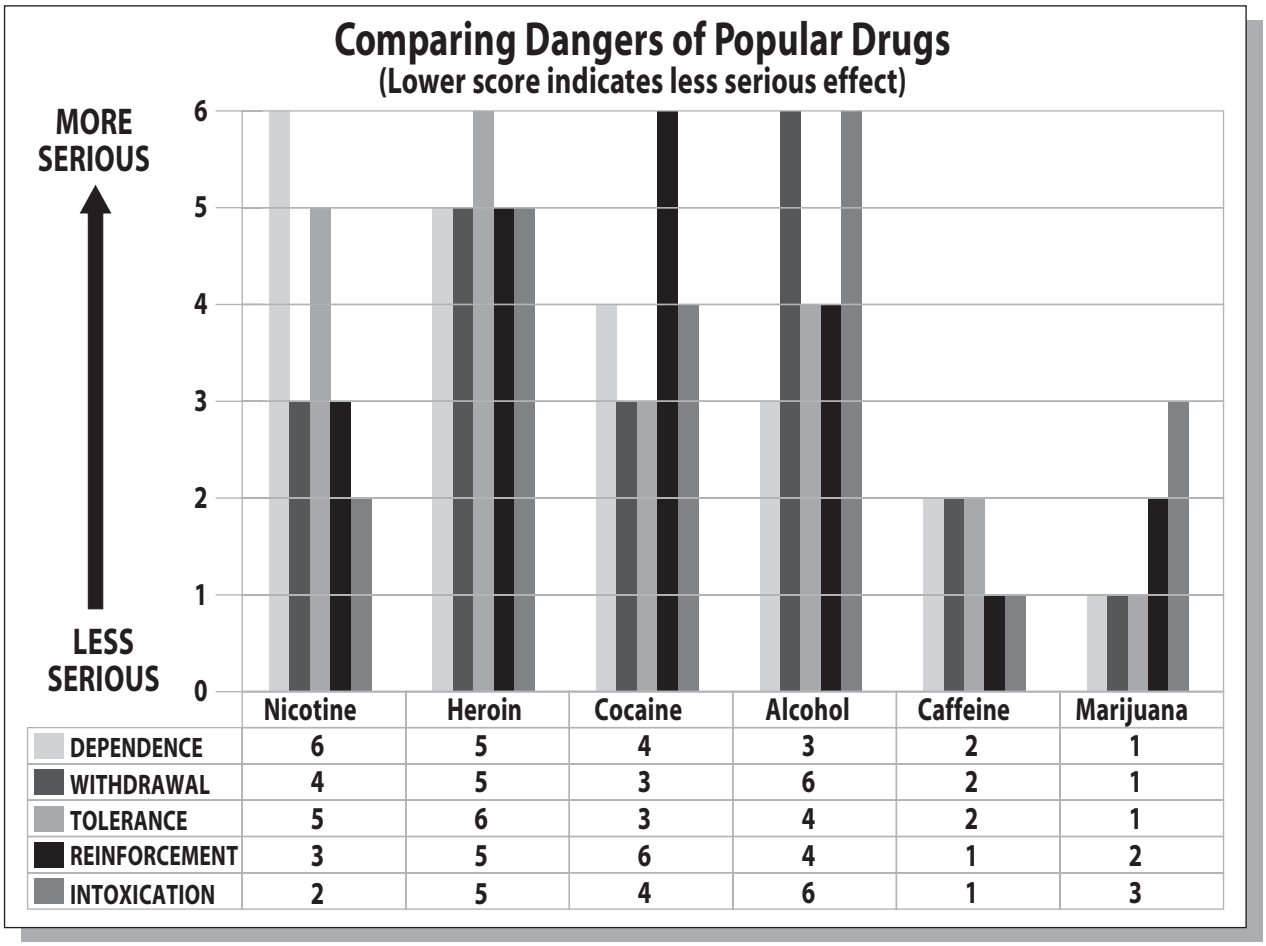
Do Our Drug Laws Focus on the Truly Dangerous Drugs?



	Nicotine	Heroin	Cocaine	Alcohol	Caffeine	Marijuana
DEPENDENCE	6	5	4	3	2	1
WITHDRAWAL	4	5	3	6	2	1
TOLERANCE	5	6	3	4	2	1
REINFORCEMENT	3	5	6	4	1	2
INTOXICATION	2	5	4	6	1	3

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Source: Dr. Jack E. Henningfield, Ph.D. for NIDA. Reported by: Philip J. Hilts, New York Times, Aug. 2, 1994 "Is Nicotine Addictive? It Depends on Whose Criteria You Use."

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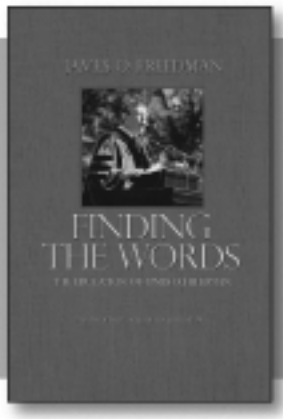

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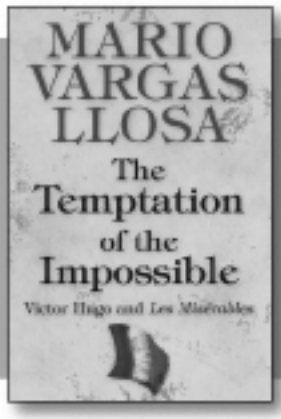

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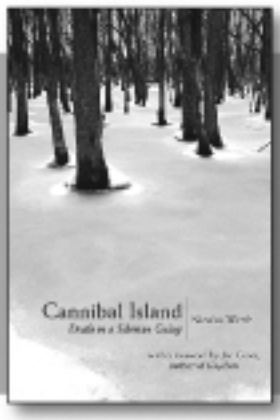

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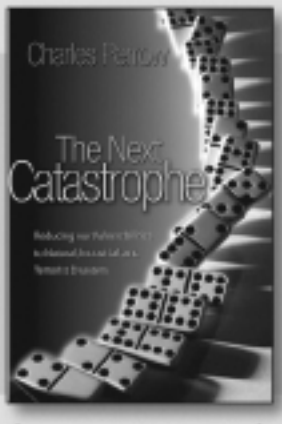

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

AMAZEMENTS

THE FIRST AMAZEMENT about *Amazing Grace* is that it exists. Set in the England of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it tells the story of the now-celebrated William Wilberforce, who became a member of Parliament in 1784, when he was twenty-four; underwent a sort of spiritual enlightenment the following year; and in 1789 began a campaign for the abolition of slavery. Slave labor, particularly on the Caribbean sugar plantations, was a huge commercial asset for Britain, and it wasn't until 1807, after intense campaigning, that Wilberforce helped to bring about the passage of the act abolishing the slave trade. (The complete abolition of slavery in the British Empire did not come until 1833.)

Quite obviously this story is a burden for film-makers. An account of devotion to a social cause, with all the jogs and jags that it predictably would encounter among the plump and satisfied—we can almost hear the debates in advance, the arguments for the financial necessity of slavery, for the fact that the end of the system would give profit advantages to countries that still used slaves, and the arguments about the insolence of criticizing a practice of antiquity. To all these risks of familiar material that lie ahead must be added the sanctified smell of a do-gooder. What an uphill struggle to transform all this possibly didactic material into an engaging film.

All the more credit to the writer Steven Knight, the director Michael Apted, the sterling cast, and everyone else prominently concerned in the gratifying result. Throughout this two-hour film, we are aware of that uphill struggle, yet all along it we quietly congratulate them on the way they are making the grade.

LARA HARWOOD

The crux of course is Knight's screenplay, which itself is something of a struggle. The dialogue is bright, historically styled yet lithe; the characterizations are graphic even with minor people. But Knight, and perhaps Apted, felt that some juggling of time was needed in order to avoid a plodding linear recital. So the picture begins in 1797, with Wilberforce well launched in his beliefs, then flashes back fifteen years to plant some beginnings, then returns to 1797—what is then called "The Present Time." Wilberforce's romance, marriage, and friendships also figure, then and "now." And there are further time-jumps that just skirt a touch of jumble.

Yet through these troubles Apted leads his actors so surely that the time leaps almost become part of the characters' (not the actors') lives. Even better, Apted—best-known here for the series of documentaries that began with *Seven Up!*, but who has also ranged through, among others, a James Bond film, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (about Loretta Lynn), and *Gorillas in the Mist*—handles this period material with no hint of acquired knowledgeability: he just seems at home.

His actors share his ease. Ioan Gruffudd, who makes his first appearance here in a major film role, gives Wilberforce a fittingly modest importance. Gruffudd is not a whirlwind personality, but he is an actor who can seize the dramatic verity of every moment. He and all of the cast bring what is almost British stock-in-trade with period pictures, as if they had just been waiting to display their command of historical style.

Two actors need special bows. Michael Gambon plays a Gambonian lord, a man who uses the decorum and dress of his time almost but not quite to excess. He can make his ultimate support of Wilberforce seem both genuine and a quirk. The acting marvel of the picture is Albert Finney as John Newton, an imposing man. Newton, like most of the characters a historical personage, had been a captain of slave ships (he keeps telling us that he transported twenty thousand slaves), then went into the church as a penance and wrote hymns. (He wrote the one whose title is also the title of this film.) Newton has become a spiritual adviser to Wilberforce. When the latter visits him in his church, Newton is in a rough smock, barefoot, mopping the stone floor. That scene, with Finney's full theater voice transforming his self-recriminations into a reminder of a late Verdi baritone aria, should be excerpted for use in drama schools—if there are any such still interested in large-scale acting.

Next in praise must come Jenny Beavan's costume designs. (She did the clothes for such delights as *Sense and Sensibility* and *The Remains of the Day*.) Other designers—there are many talented ones—might have provided this film's dreamlike hats for women and the sewn-on feeling of the men's trim clothes, but the rough green smock that Beavan gave Finney for his first appearance is a special contribution to the film's truth. The cinematographer, Remi Adefarasin, obviously responds to faces—faces as declarations—

AMAZING GRACE
SAMUEL GOLDWYN

BAMAKO
NEW YORKER

BAMBI VS. GODZILLA: On the Nature, Purpose, and Practice of the Movie Business
BY DAVID MAMET
(PANTHEON)

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and he lights them always to bring out their individuality, another means to keep *Amazing Grace* a film and not a tract.

Bamako is a comparable amazement, less so perhaps because it is much less expensive, but nonetheless amazing because it attacks dreadful conditions today. Bamako is the capital city of Mali, and this film is by a native writer-director, Abderrahmane Sissako. The subject is the exploitation of Africa's people and resources by America and Europe: the film's means to examine this exploitation is a trial—really more of an inquiry—into the power of the World Bank. (The president of the bank, Paul Wolfowitz, comes in for a scathing.)

But this trial is not a huge marmoreal display. To vitalize the proceedings and equally to include the lives of the people who are being harassed by foreign exploitation, Sissako's trial is a small-scale affair, held outdoors in a courtyard through which people come and go. During the proceedings, which are conducted with utmost gravity and legalism, uninvolved people continue on the periphery with their jobs or their lack of them. Occasionally we shift to scenes inside a neighboring house. The only consistent story besides the trial is that of a young woman, a club singer, who lives in that house and is about to leave her husband and child in order to make a living in Dakar, a story with a grim finish. At one point people in the house watch an African Western on television in which villagers are slaughtered by bandits. (One of the bandits is Danny Glover, who is a co-producer of *Bamako*.) This Western film caricatures popular attitudes.

The judges presiding over the trial are both black and white, as are the attorneys. The languages are French and Bambara. All dialogue is of course subtitled, except for a long outburst by an old man near the end that has no subtitles, seemingly to demonstrate the unheard protests of the continent.

Still, the speeches that are subtitled are strong, making a case that is familiar to every informed person but making it ring. Yet again we hear that Africa is exploited and brutalized by Western nations because of what the continent has—as one speaker says, "Africa is the poor victim of her riches." The statistics about incomes and life expectations and the smotherings by globalization are known, but what freshens them here, in this tiny improvised courtroom, is the passion, the eloquence, the dignity tinged with anger, with which the lawyers, both men and women, speak. And during all the proceedings people flow around the courtyard, sometimes even passing between a speaker and the camera. Sissako makes his point: Africa's best treasure is its humanity.

• • •

The only amazing thing about David Mamet's new book is negative. He is not only one of the prime American playwrights of our day, he is also an outstanding screenwriter (*The Verdict*, *Hoffa*, *Wag the Dog*), and he has directed some of his scripts deftly (*House of Games*). So when Mamet publishes a book of which the subtitle is *On the Nature, Purpose, and Practice of the Movie Business*, we anticipate enlightenment. (The main title is *Bambi vs. Godzilla*.) But his book is disappointing, amazingly so.

The general tone is off-the-cuff. Everything Mamet says he clearly believes—a good deal of it is on other subjects, such as current American politics—but much of what he believes about the film business has been common knowledge for a century. No one who has any interest in films is unaware of the difficulties of

Dolphins

The sun sets and prying pelicans fly just above the sea's
smooth skin;
you watch a fisherman killing a caught fish, invincibly
convinced of his humanity,
while rosy clouds commence their slow, solemn
march to the night's foothills—
you stay a moment, waiting to see dolphins
—maybe they'll dance their famous friendly tango once again—
here, on the Gulf of Mexico, where you find tire marks
and mussels along the broad beaches,
and energetic crabs that exit the sand like workers deserting
a subterranean factory en masse.
You notice abandoned, rusty loading towers.
You walk along a stone lock and wave to a few anglers,
modest types, fishing not for sport, just in hope
of postponing the last supper.
A vast, brick-red ship from Monrovia sails up
the port canal
like some bizarre imaginary beast boasting
of its own oddness,
and briefly blocks the horizon.
You think: it's worth seeking the backwaters, provincial spots
that remember much, but are uncommonly discreet,
quiet, humble places, rich, though, in caches, hidden pockets of memory
like hunters' jackets in the fall,
the bustling town's outskirts, wastelands where nothing happens,
there are no famous actors,
politicians and journalists don't appear,
but sometimes poetry is born in emptiness,
and you start to think that your childhood
halted here,
here, far from long-familiar streets—
since absence after all can't calculate distance
in light years or kilometers,
instead it calmly waits for your return, doubtless wondering
what's become of you. It meets you without fanfare and says:
Don't you know me? I'm a stamp from your vanished
collection,
I'm the stamp that showed you
your first dolphin on a backdrop of unreal, misty blue. I'm the sign of travel.
Unmoving.

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI
Translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

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breaking into film-making, of the arbitrary rewriting of scripts, of the thinly disguised seriousness of producers whose real interest is money. (Why is that shocking? What entrepreneur invests without a hope of return?)

Mamet inveighs against film schools at length, but a good deal of what he presents as knowledge wrung from experience, not mere prattle by professors, can be found in a good many of those schools. Instance: "To write a successful scene, one must stringently apply and stringently answer the following three questions: 1. Who wants what from whom? 2. What happens if they don't get it? 3. Why now?" I can't imagine a teacher of film-writing, however dull, who wouldn't thus advise.

Mamet contradicts himself. On one page he says: "Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Noël Coward wrote women characters that were fantasies of men by homosexual men. Enjoyable, indeed. But hardly accurate." On the facing page: "The question is not can one sex write for the other—if not, are we to have only unisexual dramas?—but can the individual *write*? That is, can he (a) see and (b) tell the truth?" Mamet can even contradict on the same page. "I can't stand Laurence Olivier's acting. He is stiff, self-conscious, grudging, coy, and ungenerous." Two paragraphs later, he says: "This is not to detract from his status as the world's greatest actor. He won that position fairly, kept it honorably, and contributed to the British, and to the world, theater." And, after this concession, whom does Mamet prefer to Olivier? Tony Curtis. (In fact, I admired, though hardly seconded, Mamet's consciously brave preference. He gives his reasons for steering clear, in this case, of billowy acceptances.)

He pads. He praises Vittorio De Sica in *General della Rovere* but then spends a page and a half summarizing the plot of the picture, only to point out finally that the corruption in that film also occurs in the film business. Was this trip necessary? About critics, he runs out the same old objections. Has any artist ever really liked critics? Mamet includes, in his own words, the usual whine: "Who gave them the right to judge me?" (Who gave artists the right to make art?) But at least he admits that "my work has benefited over the years from one or two such. Were such supporters of my work? Yes."

Scattered through the book, inevitably, are some percepts—if not always fresh, then at least sharply put: "The dramatic experience is essentially *the enjoyment of the postponement of enjoyment*." And there is a stinging chapter on the fallacies of auditions. But by and very large Mamet's book reads like a stenographic report of lecture appearances (though it is not), with a schmear of authority to be gobbled up by his audience and with an awareness of the takeoff time for the plane that will bring him to his next appearance. ◆

David Hajdu on Music
SONGBOOK JAM

The view of Tin Pan Alley from Harlem was so bad during the first decades of the twentieth century, a great time for white songwriters, that the African American lyricist Andy Razaf wrote a mordant work of verse on the subject, a "prayer for the Alley." Published in the 1930s in *New York Amsterdam News*, the black daily, the piece lamented the Midtown center of popular music as "lacking in soul," a place "where something original frightens the ear" and pandering technicians produce "dull similarities, year after year." Razaf, who died in 1973, never lived to see the glorious songs that he wrote with Fats Waller revived on Broadway in *Ain't Misbehavin'* in the 1980s. Nor, of course, did he get to see that show's breakout star, Nell Carter, parlay her stage success into a career on television sitcoms, beginning with the now-forgotten *You Take the Kids*. Nor, accordingly, could Razaf have foreseen that a talented kid from Brooklyn named Dante Smith would play Carter's son on that series, would later go into music under the professional name of Mos Def, and would, this January, lead off the current season of Lincoln Center's American Songbook series with a concert of defiantly black, genre-smashing music that challenged the standard definition of that songbook. Mos Def enacted Andy Razaf's revenge.

MOS DEF AND HIS BIG BAND
American Songbook, Lincoln Center

Launched nine years ago under the stewardship of Jonathan Schwartz, the onetime rock deejay whose evangelical devotion to pre-rock music is the badge of the convert, the American Songbook series began as an effort to confer the legitimacy of institutionalization upon Tin Pan Alley—or, more precisely, upon the canon of popular songs and theater music created by the iconic tunesmiths Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Harold Arlen, Richard Rodgers and his partners Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein, and their acolytes, including Jonathan's father, Arthur Schwartz: the dead white men of American song. Their music, though immeasurably rich and hardy, was, in 1998, no longer popular, in the sense of having favor with the masses of the day; rock and soul and their cousins and offspring had long supplanted it on the sales charts. The music of Tin Pan Alley had become an object of connoisseurship. Hence it qualified for protection under the auspices of Lincoln Center, which was in an expansive mode and had already accepted jazz as a constituent, alongside symphonic music, ballet, and opera.

The proposition that vintage pop tunes constitute a body of work worthy of ongoing appreciation, reconsideration, and preservation—that the songs belong in a book—was not new in the late 1990s; nor was the idea as old as Tin Pan Alley songs themselves. I remember one of the early American Songbook concerts, a tribute to Rodgers staged at Alice Tully Hall in 1999, at which Schwartz toasted the proceedings by remarking that songs of the past need to be performed "live" to stay alive. While that is true, it was not live performances but recordings that first established popular songs that were no longer popular as a repertoire; indeed, our conception of this music as a songbook is largely a secondary effect, a happy accident of a development in recording technology during the 1950s.

The current era of popular music has something in common with the first half of the last century in that the dominant form of recorded music is and was the single (today through Web-based file-sharing and downloading; then through 78-rpm acetate records). In pursuit of new hits, the singers of the 78 age, like their counterparts in pop today, sang new songs as a rule; there seemed no point in recording material that the public had heard and had decided to buy or not to buy years earlier. Popular music, then as now, was thought to derive its value from its fresh-

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ness, like journalism and fruit. With the advent of the long-playing album, which rose in popularity during the 1950s, record producers and singers found themselves needing to fill twelve or so tracks on each disk, and there simply were not enough good new songs in supply to meet the LP's demands. Billy May, the swing-band arranger who worked often with Frank Sinatra among others, recalled how Sinatra was early to suggest filling albums with songs he happened to like, regardless of their age.

Among the tunes that Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Nat King Cole, and their peers gained the freedom to record were vintage theater songs that might have seemed too sophisticated, too character-oriented, or too situational to have been recorded with hit-making in mind. Thus, record buyers of the '50s found LPs full of well-wrought but already old tunes from long-gone shows and films—such as Gershwin's "Embraceable You," from *Strike Up the Band* (1930); Kern's "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," from *Roberta* (1933); and Rodgers and Hart's "My Funny Valentine," from *Babes in Arms* (1937). With men such as Sinatra now singing greater numbers of theater songs originally written for women, and with women such as Fitzgerald singing more tunes composed for men, both the songs and their singers seemed to deepen and to expand in emotional range.

A common repertoire of durable, adaptable songs written throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the songs we have since come to know as standards, began to coalesce. Fitzgerald, working closely with Norman Granz at Verve Records, helped give form to this repertoire through her duly revered series of LPs devoted to the canonical songwriters Kern, Berlin, Porter, and the rest—with Ellington now included, in his case as both composer and band leader—each titled as the composer's *Songbook*. A recording format called the album got us thinking of the old music on those recordings in new terms, as pieces in a portfolio of treasurable mementos.

That a different sort of music for the young audience, rock and roll, was emerging simultaneously would ensure that the great American songbook would be frozen stylistically in the past that it salvaged. In the best sense of honoring a worthy legacy, then, the songbook has always been a book of the dead. Such is the body of Tin Pan Alley works that Jonathan Schwartz set out to preserve when he organized the early programs of Lincoln Center's American Songbook series. Now under new management, the series has sought in recent years to break free of the standard definition of the popular songbook as the book that defines popular standards. The series has largely abandoned its charter missions of canonization and conservation, and this has been a wondrous thing to behold, something close to a miracle at Lincoln Center.

Over the past few seasons, the American Songbook series has focused mainly (though not exclusively) on interesting, venturesome composers of the present day, such as the singer-songwriters Sufjan Stevens, Nellie McKay, and Stephin Merritt, the last of whom performed with his pop-rock band The Magnetic Fields, and Fred Hersch, the jazz pianist and composer, who recently premiered a cycle of art songs concerned with the subject of photography. The aesthetic of the series has changed from one in which a song's value was measured by its universality, its accessibility, and its durability to one that prizes singularity, surprise, and timeliness. This is a clubby, downtown approach rare even in the clubs downtown, and it is wonderfully unnerving to find it in a major New York performing-arts institution.

Mos Def led off the spring American Songbook season with a concert that took the series as far from the antiquarian preservationism of Jonathan Schwartz as Mos Def has taken himself from *You Take the Kids*. When Mos Def first began acting, playing variations on the Dickensian cliché of the devilishly cute little street tough on various series and made-for-TV movies (working then under the stage name Dante Bezé), he was already experimenting with music at home, making up his own words to records by 1980s rappers such as Big Daddy Kane, Rakim, and De La Soul. "They happened together," he later said of the dual interests he has sustained throughout his career. "I started rhyming when I was nine years old, and I caught the [acting] bug in [elementary] school, so there's no separation to the genesis of all this." As an actor, he grew up on camera in both senses of the phrase, maturing to handle better and better roles in films, including *Bamboozled*, *Monster's Ball*, and *The Italian Job*, as well as on Broadway, in *Topdog/Underdog*. As a musician, too, he has shown a drive to set new challenges and meet higher standards with each of the four CDs he has recorded since 1998.

The first, the collaboration *Mos Def & Talib Kweli are Black Star*, was most striking for its cynical take on the violence and posturing in hip-hop culture, though its beats and aural textures were typical for the day. His debut solo album, *Black on Both Sides*, released the following year, built on Mos Def's now-established strength as a lyricist with a compelling bravura rooted not in material conquest but in racial pride. Then, in 2004, came *The New Danger*, Mos Def's breakthrough as a musical artist. Picking up where the black-rock movement of the 1980s left off, he constructed a hybrid of hard rock, funk, and hip-hop—power chords, dance beats, and rap. Here and there between rhymes, he did a bit of singing—crowing, more like, in a scratchy tenor, but in tune or close enough, and with a palpable exhilaration in the making of unusual music. A follow-up in this vein, *True Magic*, was released last December, though Mos Def was already working on a greater breakthrough, experimenting in low-profile performances with ideas that took full form at Lincoln Center in January.

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That concert was held in the Allen Room, a nightclubbish theater in the cheesy mall complex that houses Jazz at Lincoln Center. The space has a stunning view of Central Park South through a floor-to-ceiling glass wall behind the stage, and the scenery served well as a diversion as the show opened with a quartet (piano, electric bass, drums, and alto sax) repeating a one-chord funk pattern for several minutes. Just as the trees and the traffic lights began to lose their interest, the sound of a New Orleans–style brass band blurted from the back of the room, and Mos Def marched the band down the aisles toward the stage. A gimmicky entrance, probably old stuff already at the turn of the last century, it always thrills. Mos Def took the center of the stage, dressed in perfectly weathered jeans, sneakers, and a hoodie, flanked by the eight players of the brass band standing in an arc, and he began to sing—well, with fervor, to what took shape as a variation on Nina Simone's version of "I Put a Spell on You."

Then things got interesting. After singing a couple of verses, Mos Def switched to rapping over "I Put a Spell on You," improvising twists on the song's original lyrics interspersed with lines of his own. The piece set the scheme for the evening, an amalgam of jazz, pop, funk, and hip-hop, with bits of rock—essentially, the history of black music in America in one night. Only Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn tried something more outlandish with their number "The History of Jazz in Three Minutes," and that was

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meant as a novelty. Mos Def was not joking here. He is charming and good at clowning between songs—at one point, he looked behind the stage and said, "I feel like Al Pacino in *The Devil's Advocate*!"—but in his music, he tends to be serious to the brink of solemnity.

"This is the American Songbook series," he reminded the audience. "So I have to do some American songs. I know some American songs." The drummer and bassist laid a funk pattern out for him, and Mos Def started to croon "America" ("My Country, 'Tis of Thee"), singing through the line "Land where my fathers died," which he repeated several times, emphatically. He rapped a bit and drifted into "The Star-Spangled Banner," picking up the anthem with the couplet "And the rockets' red glare / The bombs bursting in air," and he repeated that—and repeated it, louder each time, as the brass band countered the phrase with a terse, dissonant riff. With a bit too heavy a hand, perhaps, Mos Def made a musical collage of images heavily loaded, in every way, to take on America of the past and the present.

Rapping, then singing, talk-singing, and sing-talking to the accompaniment of jazz instruments, Mos Def would seem to be inventing a new music with familiar materials. In fact, he is building on a tradition of mixing up spoken language, verse, and melody that dates back to ragtime and runs through the history of jazz. (Nearly every style of music has incorporated speech in some way at one time or another.) As early as 1908, Scott Joplin composed what might qualify as the first proto-rap song, "Pine Apple Rag." In the swing era, Louis Armstrong, Don Redman, Cab Calloway, and Slim Gaillard all made specialties of recitative in tempo. In fact, Gaillard, late in his life, was recruited by a Canadian hip-hop group, Dream Warriors, to rap on a straight-ahead hip-hop record, "Very Easy to Assemble But Hard to Take Apart."

If the existence of Canadian hip-hop with Slim Gaillard at the microphone teaches us anything, it is that oddball combinations of musical, cultural, and historical elements are easier to assemble than one might think. The importance of Mos Def and His Big Band lies not in its uniqueness, but in how fine and true it sounds. The music, for all its surprise, has heart and the resonance of inevitability. It is mash-up music of a high order, the sound of the current era of recording—the iPod age—as live art. If it does not quite fit in our understanding of a songbook, so be it. Mos Def is now an icon of something else: the great American playlist. ◆

Jed Perl on Art

THE CONTRARIAN

The art of Giorgio Morandi has a disciplined lyricism, at once supercharged and compressed, unabashedly romantic and fiercely ascetic, luxuriantly nostalgic and vehemently modern. Working with a relatively limited range of still-life and landscape motifs for half a century, Morandi, who died in 1964 at the age of seventy-three, produced hundreds of paintings, etchings, and drawings that are among the treasures of twentieth-century art. In the United States, this formidable accomplishment remains only imperfectly understood, a shadowy achievement that is infrequently seen in museums and galleries and is mentioned glancingly, if at all, in art-historical surveys. To his admirers, and there are many of them, the situation has always been disturbing, and it has certainly been encouraging to witness, in the last three or so years, a small increase in public awareness of Morandi. At a time such as ours, when tradition and innovation are widely regarded as take-it-or-leave-it gambits, there is a great deal to learn from this powerfully paradoxical modernist.

Morandi knew how to take the exact measure of his time without in any way feeling constrained by the preconceptions of his contemporaries. The question that we need to ask is how he brought off this singular feat. And any answer must begin by acknowledging that his achievement is riskier, more unruly, and more tumultuous than many of his ardent admirers would have us believe. Morandi was not the modest, pious craftsman that he is sometimes imagined to have been; not a brilliant but cautious innovator within traditional genres; not a conservative who accepted modern principles only to the extent that they were necessary to save painting from irrelevancy. There was something more than a little crazy, even willful, even megalomaniacal, in his insistence on squeezing so much meaning from the tiny assortment of bottles and boxes that are the essential elements in his still lifes, and from the little stucco houses and modest trees and shrubs that tend to dominate his landscapes.

GIORGIO MORANDI

Morandi's desire to make the quotidian do a double take began early, before 1920, when he was associated with Carlo Carrà and Giorgio de Chirico under the somewhat airy rubric of Metaphysical Painting, and dreamed up a few chillingly hard-edged still lifes in which naturalism segues into supernaturalism as two or three forms hover in thin air, weighty yet apparently weightless. Later on, in the 1930s and 1940s, when his boxes and his bottles sometimes took on an almost ponderous density, there could still be something hyperbolic, psychologically fraught, about the inky chiaroscuro. And there was always another current in his work, sporadically in the 1930s and 1940s and often dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, an interest in treating objects as flat shapes rather than as three-dimensional volumes, so that the atmosphere in a particular still life or landscape became claustrophobic, puzzle-like, as if space itself were a riddle.

These paintings, so many of which are no more than a foot and a half high or wide, can feel uncanny, because ordinary appearances have been denaturalized beneath the painter's insistent gaze. What you see in the magnifying glass that is Morandi's art is, obviously, all those boxes and bottles and buildings, but you also notice the character of his brushstrokes, the variety of his close-toned colors, the various decisions he has made as to how to represent near and far, light and dark, volume and void. Morandi has a way of turning the familiar troublingly unfamiliar, of upsetting normal expectations about the nature of the world—something like the scientist's interest in taking things apart in order to see how they work. His paintings do not present a fully accomplished illusion so much as they suggest inquiries into the nature of illusionism. His hues—those grays and pinks and muted earth tones, frequently infused with a good deal of white—are tight-knit communities of color, orchestrations that have more to do with a search for ideal harmonies than with naturalistic description. In some of the later drawings and watercolors, the ones that contain only a very few lines or areas of color, Morandi is asking exactly how little it takes to create an illusion. These

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works on paper have the elegance of mathematical speculations.

It is the achievement of Morandi's later years, including a few of his most austere paintings and drawings, that has tended to predominate in the couple of exhibitions recently seen in New York, at the Lucas Schoormans Gallery late in 2004 and this past fall at the Paul Thiebaud Gallery. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that even while these two shows were up they were acquiring a legendary status, attracting a fiercely enthusiastic audience that included many painters. (And such is the prestige of the painter's name in certain circles that Keith McNally, who gave New York's beautiful people Balthazar and Pastis, has just opened a restaurant in Greenwich Village called Morandi.)

Morandi's reputation is a very curious thing. Although he remains in significant respects a marginalized figure, he is not one of those underappreciated moderns who sets off heated debates. Other twentieth-century painters—Raoul Dufy, for example, or André Derain, or de Chirico in the later phases of his career—remain extremely controversial even among the small circles of artists and historians who take them altogether seriously, in part because the complexity that they embraced can be dismissed as anti-modern, or as conflating traditionalism with kitsch. Morandi's reputation remains almost shockingly pristine, probably because he never strayed far from an essentially modern taste for asceticism and severity. If there is a downside to the reputation of this extraordinary artist, it is that his admirers may find what they regard as his richly appointed minimalism all too easy on the eyes, and make do with a sincere but glib reverence. Morandi did not work from formulas, but the hushed admiration for the results, all the pious talk of the silence of the work (as if a painting were ever anything but silent), can sometimes feel like formulaic admiration.

Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, circa 1946

To appreciate Morandi fully, we must dispel the myth of Morandi. Like many legends, of course, this one is not altogether untrue. Morandi did spend his entire life in Bologna. He did teach etching at a provincial art school. He did not travel that much, at least not outside Italy; he was never in Paris. And he did share an apartment with his mother and his spinster sisters, for much of his life painting in a corner of his bedroom. The virtue of Janet Abramowicz's recent book on the artist—*Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence*, published by Yale University Press—is that it situates Morandi more fully in his time and his place without in any way detracting from the genuinely, touchingly modest aspects of his life. Abramowicz studied etching with Morandi in Bologna; she became his teaching assistant and eventually a close friend of the artist and his sisters, who were, as it turns out, well-educated, highly sophisticated women. More than anything else ever published in English, her book helps us to situate Morandi in the Italian context. Abramowicz sets his art and his teaching career within the broader movements of modernism and fascism. She suggests that the brief period around 1920 when Morandi was seen as closely associated with the avant-garde, far from being anomalous, was perfectly consistent with a life that always involved an active, albeit at-an-angle, relationship with Italian cultural experience.

A generation ago, Americans tended to have only a vague grasp of the development of modern art outside Paris, especially in the chaotic years of the 1920s and 1930s. Abramowicz's book is part of a broader effort, which has gained force in the universities and the museums since the 1960s, to see modern art as evolving simultaneously in centers all over Europe, and to see those developments as set in a complex counterpoint with social and political movements. She makes it clear that the image of Morandi as a singularly unworldly artist was largely an invention of the immediate period following World War II—a calculated effort on the part of the artist and some of his supporters to draw attention from his not exactly unfriendly relations with fascist officialdom.

Fascism, in the 1920s, had a flirtation with modernism in the arts, and Morandi, in an autobiographical essay written in 1928, went so far as to say that he "had much faith in Fascism from its beginnings—faith that never wavered even during its most sad and tempestuous days." During the 1920s and 1930s, his opportunities to exhibit and to sell his work grew as friends sympathetic to the movement or directly involved in it gained influence in various government agencies that controlled cultural life. It was only in 1930, through the intervention of fascist associates, that Morandi finally fulfilled his dream of obtaining a permanent position in Bologna's Accademia di Belle Arti. While the situation would become more ambiguous for Morandi by the end of the 1930s, when the anti-modernist viewpoint was finally fully embraced by the fascists, there can be no doubt that Morandi's career was given many a boost during those years, and that he was perfectly happy with the situation. Mussolini himself owned two of Morandi's paintings, a fact that the artist proudly cited in a job application.

In Abramowicz's portrait, Morandi emerges as a troublingly compromised figure, although it is also well to remember that we are speaking about a time and a place when pitifully few people's actions

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could be characterized as admirable, and there were many who did far worse than Morandi. I suppose you could say that he behaved like all too many Europeans, less concerned with fundamental decency than with protecting his own skin. What is certain is that we are once and for all done with the almost saccharinely saintly image of Morandi, the one that was circulating in the United States when I first got to know his work, around 1970, and which still persists. The demythologization is all for the good. If Abramowicz has, in her gentle way, knocked Morandi off his pedestal, the most interesting result has less to do with social and political history than with art history, for we begin to see that the inwardness of his art is a dynamic principle rather than a static one, a progressive enriching of his own craft in response to the ideas about art and its relationship with culture that were in the very air that he breathed.

After reading Abramowicz's book, nobody can doubt that Morandi was fully aware of the power that his paintings had to provoke a variety of responses. We gain a renewed sense of the resonances that can be unleashed by these little compositions. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, Morandi's still lifes and landscapes were said to convey, through their earthiness and their simplicity, some essentially Italian spirit. But the modesty of these works was also interpreted as a rejection of the great Italian tradition of figure composition, and thus of Italy itself. Others saw Morandi as the last disciple of Cézanne, not an Italian artist so much as a European modernist, whose work some even interpreted as essentially abstract, comparable to Mondrian in its exploration of formal and emotional extremes through a limited vocabulary. And then there were those who viewed his paintings as "completely autonomous," the work of an artist who was "'the most out of step' in the world."

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As Abramowicz struggles to set Morandi, a man generally careful with words, in the context of this cacophony of interpretations, he begins to look less like an isolated figure and more like a headstrong contrarian. I suspect that his insistent focus on still life and landscape spelled not only a retreat from the idealization of human actions that had been the central focus of art in the Renaissance, but more specifically a utopian alternative to the terrors of his own century, which had already had more than its fair share of human calamities. Of course still life and landscape had been among the modern artist's essential themes long before Morandi came onto the scene, providing Corot and Courbet and Cézanne with a naturalistic materiality ripe for painterly dematerialization. Morandi, however, was in certain respects less engaged with the quotidian than Cézanne, or for that matter than Picasso or Braque. These artists, even in their most formal and abstract works, remained interested in still life as a naturalistic drama, as an arrangement of objects associated with the domesticity of the kitchen or the social and intellectual life of the café. Morandi was so determined to detach his objects from what had been their normative roles in the world that he adopted the curious habit of literally altering them with a coat of paint, inscribing stripes on a bottle or ovals on a box, as if it were necessary to denaturalize the real before it could become part of the fiction that is a painting.

Morandi's work does relate to a strain of emblematic still-life painting that dates back to the Renaissance and the Baroque, and his early association with the Metaphysical painters underscores this tendency to present "an imagery intensified by philosophical reverie," as James Thrall Soby put it in 1949 in *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, a pioneering Museum of Modern Art catalogue. This philosophical reverie is associative rather than systematic, with a still-life painting suggesting a nightmarish labyrinth, a sun-splashed Elysium, a hesitant intimacy, a destabilizing anxiety, and even (as people who know Bologna have frequently observed) the experience of the flâneur wandering through the city's shadowy arcades. Morandi confounds ordinary expectations. If his still lifes often suggest landscapes or cityscapes, his landscapes, although exquisitely evocative of a certain kind of northern Italian terrain, rarely invite the viewer to become an imaginative wanderer, as Cézanne does in even some of his most enigmatic canvases. As for Morandi's flower paintings, they are works of a beautiful perversity, with the flowers more mineral than vegetal, hewn of a strong substance, sometimes as dense as stone.

LARA HARWOOD

Abramowicz quotes a character in Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* who observes of Morandi's work that he "has to fight against the hostility of Nature and Death," arguing that these still lifes and flower studies are grounded in "the *fear* of reality." Far from beginning with a view of still life or landscape as a traditional genre with a stable meaning, Morandi backs his way into the high-art traditions, beginning with the belief that nothing can be taken for granted. There is something essentially rebellious in his attitude toward all artistic genres, an attitude that goes back to his days as a student at the Accademia in Bologna, when he was so fed up with the conservatism of his teachers that he nearly failed to graduate. Abramowicz's discussion of these early pedagogical conflicts is a fascinating element in her book, suggesting as it does that if Morandi would eventually be revered as one of the century's great exemplars of classical values, he found his way to that position only after first rejecting his classical training in favor of the attractions of the avant-garde.

I do not know if Morandi saw any irony in the fact that he himself became a teacher at the Accademia, guiding young artists through the intricacies of intaglio printmaking. His own etchings, frequently black-and-white variations on the motifs in the still-life and landscape paintings, are a freestanding achievement, one of the twentieth century's most persuasive reaffirmations of a technique that had its first heyday in the seventeenth century. Initially, Morandi's approach can look almost sweetly old-fashioned. He loves to fill the surface with the hatched and cross-hatched lines that artists had for centuries marshaled to locate objects in a three-dimensional space, with the angling of the lines functioning as a perspectival indicator. Sometimes Morandi covers the surface with a light lacework of angled marks, but more often he thickens the hatched areas to create velvety blacks. His most magical effects involve a ripe chiaroscuro that turns each precious glimpse of a tabletop or a rural road into an ever-darkening drama, a drama in which the succession of hatched scrims or screens, rather than settling into fictive space, suggests a third dimension collapsed into two-dimensional space. Only one printmaker before Morandi had dared to re-imagine the blackness of cross-hatching as a way of foregrounding the abyss, and that was Rembrandt. It is as if oblivion has been rendered in the present tense.

Morandi, Abramowicz tells us, had acquired several drawings by Seurat after World War II. Their scrupulous orchestrations of darks and their emphasis on the importance of the silhouette are surely one key to Morandi's art, obviously in the prints but also in the paintings and

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the watercolors. The constant reference to the importance of Cézanne in writings on Morandi is not overstated, but the idea that Morandi ought to be identified with a single direction in modern art does not really do justice to the complexities of his achievement. Morandi's interest in the psychological power of an idiosyncratic form may owe more to Seurat than to Cézanne. And in many of his paintings, still lifes and landscapes alike, there are atmospheric effects, an interest in glimmerings and glintings of light and soft layers of airy atmosphere that bring to mind not Cézanne and Post-Impressionism so much as Monet's Impressionism and even, in certain landscapes, the watercolor-like stroke of Renoir. One can imagine Morandi learning a great deal from Courbet and Corot and even Redon, and of course he embraced the modernist interest in overlooked aspects of earlier Italian art—not only the play of geometry in Uccello and Piero, but also the heightened realism of Caravaggio. Then again, it is unimaginable to think of what Morandi would have done with any of this if he had not felt the impact of Picasso and Cubism, which registered overtly on his work only briefly, but is there all the way through, in his constant recognition that the modern artist must operate at the edge of abstraction.

In Morandi's work, all these influences exist uneasily, refusing any final resolution, an embarrassment of riches that can barely be contained by the preternatural elegance of his compositions. Morandi, whose subtlety never masks his avidity, exults in the variegated literalism of the visual arts. There is the literalism of his reverence for tradition, for the hatched lines of the Old Masters, or the architectonic flowers that hark back to Cézanne and Chardin, or the dramatic foreboding expressed by a Caravaggesque chiaroscuro. Then there is the literalism of nature, of the quality of light at a particular moment, the overlapping shadows on a table, the flickering highlight on a ceramic vase. And then there is the literalism of paint itself, of the shimmering brushwork, the not-quite-straight contours, the close orchestrations of browns and grays. It is this cacophony of literalisms, sitting uneasily with one another, that guards the work against the dangers of academicism. The coherence of Morandi's paintings is always an ad hoc coherence, the coherence of forces that have converged in a particular way in a particular painting, a structural coherence grounded in psychological experience, a triumph not of formal analysis but of feeling—and of the will.

To imagine Morandi teaching at the Accademia in Bologna is to imagine a man who somehow accepted the paradoxical nature of the modern artistic vocation, who knew that in spite of his academic position he was a critic of all academic assumptions. This is perhaps his greatest significance right now, when we live in an art world that is dominated by a variety of academicisms. There is the academy of the market, which is an academy of cheap thrills, its practices codified in any number of MFA programs. But there is also the academy of those who oppose the market, and who desperately look for some form of assurance in what they regard as canonical values, whether traditionalist or modernist; it hardly matters. The trouble is that any form of groupthink, whether traditional or anti-traditional, can become a form of irresponsibility, a refusal to make your own judgments not only about the present but also about the past. There may have been a time when T. S. Eliot's bracing vision of the impersonality of tradition offered a key to the future, but by now the only view of the past that seems to be of any help to the working artist is a radically personalized view of the high-art traditions.

Morandi lived his whole life in a country where the classical past was a part of daily life, and the proximity of those august traditions somehow served as a reminder that an artist's relationship with the past is by its very nature equivocal, uncertain. Morandi could be a classicist, at least after his own fashion, in the austere lucidity of some of the Metaphysical paintings, in the after-images of columns and arches that haunt the still lifes, and in the fascination with variations on fundamental forms that, as Fairfield Porter once wrote, "differ from one another like the cases in the declension of a Latin noun." Compared, however, with the full-out embrace of classical experience that you find in the work of de Chirico or Picasso, Morandi's work suggests an interest in keeping those ancient traditions at bay, as indeed he kept his distance from every tradition. Morandi's relationship with Chardin, or Corot, or Cézanne, was partial, vexatious, elusive. His traditionalism always involved some variety of contrarianism, a refusal to go with any flow.

Morandi's paintings and etchings, improbable in their very perfection, are the products of a man who lived in a period that was dominated, much as ours is, by ideologies and agitprop, artistic and otherwise. And nobody knew better than Morandi that tradition itself could become an ideology, a form of agitprop. Amid a culture drunk on its own stupidities, he succeeded, by some extraordinary act of will, in sustaining the curious convictions of a solitary imagination. ◆

Andrew Sullivan

THE MULLAH

Meet the Global Moral Majority.

THE ENEMY AT HOME: THE CULTURAL LEFT AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY FOR 9/11
By Dinesh D'Souza
(Doubleday, 333 pp., $26.95)

I.

American conservatism is in crisis. That much is almost universally clear. But the next period in American politics will be determined not least by how clearly we understand the crisis of the right. For it may be that the remarkably successful Republican coalition of the last three decades is not at all doomed at the polls. A Giuliani or Romney candidacy, especially up against a Clinton candidacy, could well eke out a victory in 2008. Nor is it quite the case that the familiar fault lines within the movement—libertarians versus social conservatives, neoconservatives versus realists, economic internationalists versus populists—have somehow come to a head all at once. The strains are there, all right, and they have been made much more acute in the Bush years under the weight of massive spending increases, evangelical overreach, abuse of executive power, conventional corruption, and (most disastrously) a mismanaged war. But the reflexive sense of cohesion on the right still manages to keep the rickety coalition together—if only because of the palpable weakness of the alternatives, at least so far.

The crisis, rather, is of a different kind. It is intellectual, and it is deeper than anything captured by the conventional categories. The sole merit of Dinesh D'Souza's new book is that it acknowledges this intellectual collapse, even as it is itself a document of that collapse; and it proposes a new way forward. Whatever

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else may be said about *The Enemy at Home*—and the maledictions from left and right have been ferocious—it has at least the courage to pursue the logic of Bush-era conservatism all the way to its end. In this sense, it is a mainstream conservative book, in its own way even a visionary one, expanding on the direction that American conservatism has taken and daring it to continue aggressively on that very path.

What is that path? At its core is a deepening rejection of cultural and philosophical modernity. D'Souza believes that the defining new distinction in American politics is no longer between the economic right and the economic left. The size of government and its role as a guardian of the public welfare are increasingly dead issues, or issues where no vital energy crackles. D'Souza rightly holds that the real divide in the new century is between authority and autonomy, between faith-based politics and individual freedom. And in this struggle at the level of first principles, D'Souza chooses his own side. He is at war with the modern West. If forced to choose between a theocratic order that upheld traditional morality and a secular order that saw such morality marginalized, D'Souza is with the former. He puts it more graphically himself: "Yes, I would rather go to a baseball game or have a drink with Michael Moore than with the grand mufti of Egypt. But when it comes to core beliefs, I'd have to confess that I'm closer to the dignified fellow in the long robe and prayer beads than to the slovenly fellow with the baseball cap."

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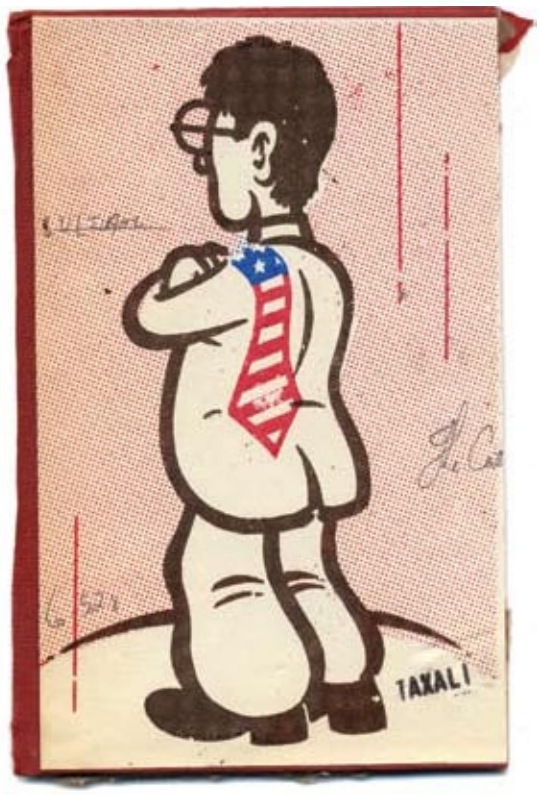
The Enemy at Home is essentially an unpacking of that extraordinary confession. D'Souza argues that there are only two choices for a human being to make in the twenty-first century with respect to "core beliefs": "traditional morality" and what he calls "liberal morality." Traditional morality, in D'Souza's view, "is based on the notion that there is a moral order in the universe, which establishes an enduring standard of right and wrong. All the major religions of the world agree on the existence of this moral order. There is also a surprising degree of unanimity about the content of this moral order." Liberal morality, by contrast, consists first of all in the right of the individual to choose for him- or herself what morality is. It is about "autonomy, individuality, and self-fulfillment as moral ideals." Its essence is the notion that "each person must decide for himself or herself what is right in a particular situation." D'Souza argues that the shift in America over the past few decades from traditional morality to liberal morality is "the most important fact of the past half-century."

It is crucial to remember that, for all the conservative criticism of *The Enemy at Home*, this argument is just as central to the base of the current Republican Party as it is to this book. In this respect, *The Enemy at Home* is an utterly unremarkable exploration of what theoconservatism really requires. It demands that individual autonomy be sacrificed for obedience to the external moral order.



Theoconservatism refuses to accept the notion that government can ever aspire to be neutral with respect to competing visions of morality. One of D'Souza's mentors in this view, Richard John Neuhaus, has written that theoconservatism is designed to create an ideological "alternative both to Marxism and secularized liberalism" that would give America "a definition of reality, an ideology, based on Jewish-Christian religion, that [is] as creative, comprehensive, and compelling as was Marx's definition of reality." Robert P. George, another of D'Souza's ideological allies, insists that "there can be no legitimate claim for secularism to be a 'neutral' doctrine that deserves privileged status as the national public philosophy." Given the existence of an external moral order, the duty of the state is therefore to reflect that external order, and the duty of citizens is to obey it. In the words of former Senator Rick Santorum, "I don't want a government that is neutral between virtue and vice."

Neither does D'Souza. And when he sees the results of individual autonomy, choice, and freedom in modernity, he is appalled. The picture of America that emerges from these pages is as deep an indictment of America, as much an exercise in "America-bashing," as anything produced on the far left. For D'Souza, America has become a country dedicated to the values of "secularism, feminism, homosexuality, prostitution, and pornography." Guided by the cultural left, America is increasingly seen as "a shining beacon of global depravity, a kind of Gomorrah on a Hill." For good measure, he does not exculpate Republican or "red" America in this indictment. He is aware that the red states consume as much pornography as the blue ones, and have, in some cases, higher divorce, abortion, crime, and illegitimacy rates. He is also aware that red-staters consume *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives* just as avidly as the denizens of the Upper East Side and Dupont Circle. "The contrast that some on the right draw between a decadent liberal coastline and a virtuous conservative heartland seems to be invalid," D'Souza laments. "Liberal values have penetrated the heartland."

All of this is enough to make a theoconservative despair. And the omens are not good. On their key issues—abortion and gay marriage—the religious right (which D'Souza ardently supports) has seen little progress after a generation in positions of power. Despite eighteen years of Republican presidencies, *Roe* is still the law of the land. Despite massive political organization, same-sex marriage is now part of the fabric in Massachusetts, and is poised to become law in California, and has swept much of the rest of the Western world. Even more worryingly, no serious Republican candidate for the presidency in 2008 adequately expresses the worldview of the religious right. Their best hope is a Mormon who was solidly pro-choice and pro-gay only a few years ago. And the Iraq war is the coup de grâce. By robbing Republicans of national security as an issue, it makes a left-liberal triumph dangerously close to reality.

D'Souza is admirably more candid about the precarious state of American

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conservatism than many others. "If the left can convert national security—usually a source of political strength for the right—into a liability, then it has vastly improved its chances for winning future elections.... The entire conservative agenda, from tax cuts to school choice to restricting abortion, would be stalled," he writes. "Moreover, the right's political loss would be followed by a cultural assault seeking to demonize Bush as another Nixon and conservatives as dangerous fanatics who cannot again be trusted with power. At a time when the right is within sight of complete victory, it risks losing everything and returning to the minority status it held in the years before Reagan."

Unless you understand this critical philosophical and political context, D'Souza's book makes no sense. D'Souza believes that his side is losing the culture war at home, and may soon be losing the political one as well. The 2006 elections proved the severe fragility of a political strategy dependent on a base of evangelical believers corralled into supporting a theoconservative social policy and a neoconservative foreign policy. D'Souza runs the numbers at home and, with the war in Iraq coming undone, senses he cannot win. So what to do? As with many generals who find themselves losing a war, D'Souza has decided to widen it.

II.

Widen it how? By globalizing theoconservatism. This is the central argument of D'Souza's book: that cultural globalization is the last chance for theoconservatism in its death match with liberal modernity. If a majority of Americans do not support a system of government resting on an external and divine moral order, then the obvious next move is to enlist the billions of fundamentalist believers in the developing world to forge a global alliance. If you combine the premodern patriarchs among the Christians of Africa and Asia and the Muslims of the Middle East and pit them against the degenerate, declining individualists in the West, a global theoconservative victory is possible.

That is D'Souza's vision, and he is not shy about it. The test case for this strategy can be seen most graphically in the Anglican Church. Theoconservative Episcopalians in Northern Virginia have sought protection under a Nigerian prelate who believes that even speech about homosexuality should be criminalized. If theoconservatism cannot work as a governing majority in the First World, then it is time to forge an alliance between half of America with the Third World.

One has to admire at least the frankness with which this secessionist strategy for conservatism is laid out. "How can we use the war on terror to win the culture war?" D'Souza asks in a final chapter called "Battle Plan for the Right." Notice here that defeating the forces of Islamist terror is merely instrumental to the deeper struggle to defeat modern individualism and autonomy. The idea of a common American commitment to the Constitution's guarantees of individual freedom and autonomy is secondary to the global battle for the "external moral order." Loyalty is not to country, but to a worldwide theoconservative ideology. Like the Marxists of old, the theoconservatives see their movement increasingly as global, resting on eternal truths, and not compatible with the "liberal morality" of their autonomous bourgeois fellow Westerners.

It is in such a context that D'Souza praises Islamism as a global ideology. Wahhabi Islam, the kind that animated Osama bin Laden, "is not a breeding ground of Islamic radicalism," he instructs. "It is a breeding ground of Islamic obedience. The essence of the Wahhabi doctrine is doctrinal and social conservatism." From D'Souza's point of view, what's not to like? No, he is not a supporter of terrorism. But wait. Bin Laden, it turns out, is not simply a terrorist. "For many Muslims," D'Souza explains, "it is remarkable that a man born into a multimillion-dollar empire, a man who could be on a yacht in San Tropez with a blonde on one arm and a brunette on the other, has chosen to live in a cave in Afghanistan and risk his life for his beliefs." The founder of Islamist thought, Sayyid Qutb, has "developed a critique of America and the West that is far more sophisticated and comprehensive than anything produced by the Marxists and the communists." (Is there anybody in America after September 11 who is *not* an expert on Sayyid Qutb?) Bin Laden, moreover, correctly diagnoses the core problem with modern America. D'Souza explains that bin Laden "calls America a civilization in rebellion against God because 'you separate religion from your policies' and thus 'contradict the absolute authority of the Lord and Creator.'" Seen in this philosophical context, the overlap between the grand mufti of Egypt and James Dobson is considerable. Why not a global merger?

D'Souza finds much to admire in the Islamist critique of the West. Islamists "stress that if the West has solved the economic problem, it has not solved the moral problem. Although Islam may not be relevant in creating prosperity or military success, it is relevant in showing human nature the way to justice, goodness, and happiness." Islam, after all, began by outlawing "bedouin practices such as rape, adultery, and homosexuality, as well as the bedouin custom of killing infant girls." He cites Islamists as arguing that "Islam is best understood not in terms of obedience but rather in terms of voluntary submission to a divinely established moral order." How different is this from the worldview of, say, Sam Brownback or Ted Haggard (the latter of whom D'Souza thanks in his acknowledgments)? Isn't "voluntary submission to a divinely established moral order" another way of saying "born again"? D'Souza even enlists the Ayatollah Khomeini in the pro-life cause: "Khomeini writes that Allah has 'laid down injunctions for man extending from before the embryo is formed until after man is placed in the tomb.... There is not a single topic in human life for which Islam has not provided instruction and established a norm.'" Meet the Global Moral Majority.

The separation of church and state is particularly vexing for D'Souza, as it is for the Christianist right in general. And when he looks at traditional Islamic societies, he sees a model for how America should be properly understood. As Qutb lamented about even a dry county in Colorado in the 1940s, "God's existence is not denied, but His domain is restricted to the heavens and his rule on earth is suspended." The result is a society best described, in one Islamist's words (cited by D'Souza), as "a collection of casinos, supermarkets, and whorehouses linked together by endless highways passing through nowhere." "Where," D'Souza asks, "are the moral standards in American popular culture? It seems that there are none, just as the Muslims allege." Compared with Islamic society, the West is profoundly immoral: "The distinguished Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, 'The most basic right of a child is to have two parents, and this right is taken away from nearly half of the children in Western society.'" Such are the consequences of abandoning patriarchy. "If children had the vote," D'Souza adds for good measure, "there would be no such thing as divorce. Children are to the right of even the Muslims on this issue."

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There is more. Islamist societies are paragons of social meaning and cohesion. Women know their place; homosexuals are invisible; blasphemy is illegal; pornography is banned; modesty is enforced. "My two grandmothers," D'Souza assures

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his possibly nervous female readers, "were both tyrants who ruled over their husbands. Patriarchy doesn't make women less powerful—it merely diverts their power to the domain of the household." Criticizing Muslim countries for forcing women to wear a veil or a burka in public is to put on the "blinders of ethnocentrism," even to indulge in "Islamophobia." Here is a bigotry that the religious right and the politically correct left may together despise. But D'Souza drives the point home for the sake of the right, not the left: "Many Muslims are convinced that women's liberation and sexual liberation, of the kind promoted by the cultural left, would be a disaster for their society … would undermine their religion, overturn their moral beliefs, and destroy their traditional families. In believing these things, of course, the Muslims are absolutely correct."

What D'Souza admires in particular is the absence of any space between the individual and the community's religious faith. He objects to the notion of a conscience that is somehow independent of an externally imposed moral code—that is more than a means for obedience. He quotes Bernard Lewis favorably: "Most Muslim countries are still profoundly Muslim in a way and in a sense that most Christian countries are no longer Christian." D'Souza goes on: "Unlike many Christians, who have multiple identities, only one of which is that they happen to be Christian, Muslims typically regard their religion as central to both their private and public identity, and consider all other affiliations as secondary or derivative." This premodern sense of the self—it is nothing other than that—is the one to which D'Souza aspires. He even sees a restorative theocon residue in suicide bombing: "There are plenty of losers in America: how many of them could be persuaded to blow themselves up for a little money and the prospect of six dozen virgins in heaven?" D'Souza's book is the first defense I have ever read of suicide bombing as a sign of underlying cultural health.

The great blessing of Islamic society is, in D'Souza's words, that "liberalism as a political force simply does not exist." By liberalism, he means "doctrines such as 'Men and women should have the same roles in society,' 'Freedom of expression includes the right to publish material that is sexually explicit or blasphemous,' or 'Government should not seek to promote religion or legislate morality.'" D'Souza takes particular pleasure in letting us know that one celebrated victim of jihadism, Salman Rushdie, "has no constituency in the Muslim world." He takes even more pleasure in informing us that "in America, a fundamentalist is one who believes the Bible is the literal, unadulterated word of God. By this definition, however, all Muslims are 'fundamentalists' because all Muslims believe that the Koran is the literal, unadulterated word of God given in the Arabic language by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad." Never mind that the Islamic tradition helped to pioneer the figurative reading of biblical texts. It is on such shared worldviews that alliances are most sturdily built.

There is no mention in the book of the pathological anti-Semitism that currently accompanies these traditional Islamic societies. But D'Souza goes out of his way to draw a distinction between Islamist terrorism undertaken purely in the name of jihad—September 11, the Bali bombing, the London and Madrid massacres—and terrorism that he regards as legitimate self-defense. He puts "the conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir" in the latter category: "No one can deny the horror of Palestinian and Chechen attacks upon civilians, but these have to be measured against the state-sponsored terror on the other side: the bulldozing of Palestinian homes, the shooting of stone-throwing teenagers, the obliteration of the Chechen capital of Grozny … by Russian troops."

D'Souza is equally unperturbed by the fanatical hatred of homosexuality in

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traditional Islam. "The Koran describes homosexuals as 'people of the wrath of Allah,' and most Muslims find the notion of legitimizing what they perceive as sinful conduct to be disgusting and unspeakable," he writes. And he seems to believe that the advance of gay equality in the West is an unnecessary provocation to the allies whom he wishes to recruit. Throughout the book, he expresses revulsion for what he calls "the practice." "Shortly after the fall of Baghdad," he remarks, "graffiti began to appear on the walls of the city and its environs. The following scrawl caught my attention. 'Marriage of the same sex became legal in America. Is this, with the mafia and drugs, what you want to bring to Iraq, America? Is this the freedom you promised?' " He does find the dehumanization of gays in Islamic societies "uncharitable," even "appallingly" so, but still quotes one scholar thus: "What human? What rights?" D'Souza's only deviance from Muslim doctrine on the question of homosexuality is this: "There may be good reasons to leave them alone." (May? Them?) The hangings and stonings and lynchings of gays in the Middle East are passed over in silence. D'Souza routinely lists homosexual orientation alongside such acts as rape, adultery, and abortion.

III.

In all of this, D'Souza is saying nothing that has not already been said on the theoconservative right. The Christianist base of the Republican Party strongly believes that the law can never attempt to be morally neutral; it believes passionately in fixed gender roles and the patriarchy of the traditional family; it opposes blasphemy and legal pornography; it wants no legal protections for gay couples (Santorum and Bush even supported keeping private, adult gay sex illegal in their respective states). For them, gay promiscuity and gay monogamy are equally abhorrent. In all of this, there is considerable overlap with traditional Islam. In an Islamic society, for example, there would have been no debate about Bill Clinton's behavior in office, no distinction between his public role and his private life: "It is only in the liberal universe that Clinton's conduct—which all traditional cultures revile, and which the Muslims would punish by stoning or flogging—becomes a minor peccadillo that is of no public concern."

Moreover, Islamism removes the separation of church and state that D'Souza sees as the *fons et origo* of America's moral pollution. He quotes Khaled Abou El Fadl, a distinguished Islamic thinker in Los Angeles: "A case for democracy presented from within Islam must accept the idea of God's sovereignty. It cannot substitute popular sovereignty for divine sovereignty but must instead show how popular sovereignty … expresses God's authority, properly understood." In case we haven't absorbed the proper lesson for the United States, D'Souza adds: "This mirrors the Declaration of Independence's argument that it is the Creator who endows us with our inalienable rights, and thus it is a perfect expression of the conservative understanding of American democracy."

Just to be clear: D'Souza is arguing that a democracy under divine authority and subject to theological truth is "a perfect expression of the conservative understanding of American democracy." Why should we be surprised that he wants an alliance with theocratic autocracies in the developing world? In D'Souza's eyes, both the American Constitution and traditional Islam have a common foe. "Secularism is the common enemy," D'Souza quotes a Muslim scholar as saying. "Men and women in the West who are still devoted to the life of faith should know that those closest to them in this world are Muslims." In a spectacular attempt to prove he means exactly this, D'Souza throws into the mix an excoriation of Turkey as excessively secular. Atatürk's "militant secularization of Turkey is being reversed," D'Souza notes, "and on balance it is a good thing. Muslims have the right to live in Islamic states under Muslim law if they wish."

D'Souza is rehearsing the mainstream view of the religious right with respect to the notion of separating church and state. They oppose it, and so does he. But with what a twist! Where he differs from the religious right is in his willingness to find the proper political authority, the proper models of political virtue, in Islam. Islam and Christianity together: that is D'Souza's dream. He does not seem especially interested in God. He writes nothing about his own faith, whatever it is. His interest is not in the metaphysics or the mysteries of religion, but in the uses of religion for social control. (Somewhere Machiavelli is smiling.) In the goal of maintaining patriarchy, banning divorce, outlawing homosexuality, and policing blasphemy, any orthodoxy will do. D'Souza's religion, in a sense, is social conservatism. He is not going to let a minor matter such as the meanings of God get in the way of his religion.

In this regard, of course, he runs the risk of isolation. He is going to have a hard time keeping his coalition of the holy together. The members of the Christianist right in America believe that Islam is a false faith, opposed to their own. And this actual faith of theirs, their awkward belief in the exclusive truth of their own revelation, will certainly get in the way of their supporting an alliance of moral parity, or even an alliance of convenience, with a rival faith. Even the Republican Episcopalians in Falls Church eager to be run by Nigerians draw the line at Nigerian Muslims (with whom Nigerian Christians are actually at war).

Similarly, most secular conservatives have understood the war on terror as in part a war against the more violent rigidities of Islam. Many such conservatives see the way in which women are treated in Muslim society as repulsive; they find the Nazi-like anti-Semitism evil, and the reflexive comfort with violence and lack of religious freedom in much of the Muslim world appalling. The notion of actually seeing the world sympathetically through Islamist eyes—of agreeing with them on the need to keep women in burkas, gays hidden, and religious faith as the arbiter of public policy—is, well, very difficult. That explains why many conservatives have criticized this book severely. Islamism is not their idea of how to fix the crisis of conservatism.

D'Souza's thesis was indeed described as "regrettable" and "nonsensical" by Victor Davis Hanson, and as "intellectually obtuse, poorly informed and, most importantly, an irresponsible exercise in putatively conservative bomb-throwing" by the influential Republican blogger Dean Barnett. Scott Johnson, of the popular Republican blog *Powerline*, had this to say about the book in *The New Criterion*: "Having engaged in the effort to understand the Muslims as they understand themselves … D'Souza generally does not seek to judge them by a standard above or beyond Islam." But this is somewhat unfair to D'Souza. His standard for Islam is its effectiveness at maintaining a conservative social order. He doesn't care if the religion is Islam or Christianity, or if its adherents are black, brown, or white—as long as it performs the necessary social task.

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D'Souza must have been aware of the likelihood of such a response, and he has prepared a pre-emptive strike in the book. He is a veteran of stage-managed controversies. Being in the business of shock, he does not put out a book without a careful assessment of how shocking is too shocking. He knows that, from the perspective of actual evangelical Christians and conventional secular conservatives, his central thesis is alarming, even offensive. He is well aware that most on the right will be reluctant to endorse the

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Muslim version of theoconservatism—it seems scarier, doesn't it, when the theocons are Arabs?—and so he had to devise something in the book to overcome these groups' distrust.

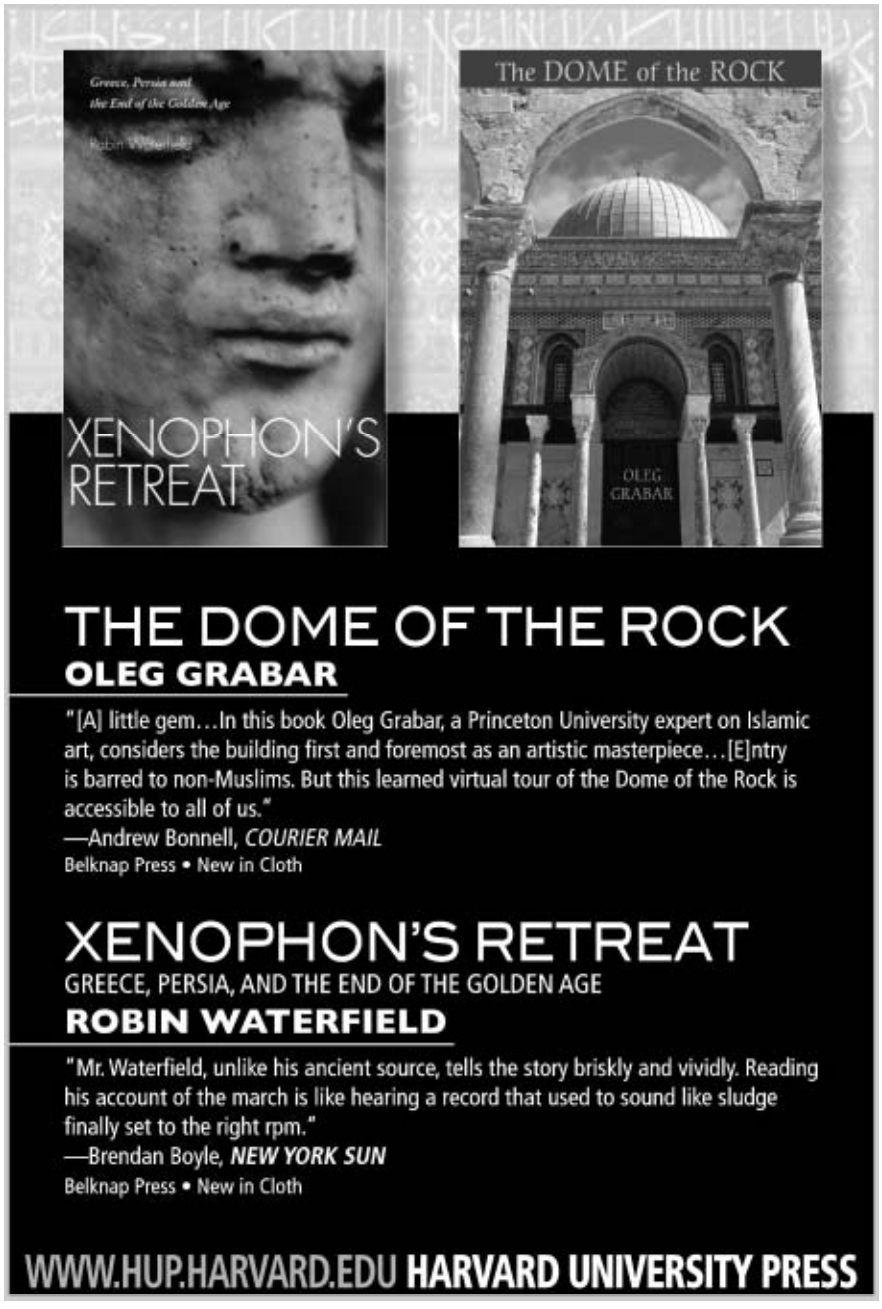
So what to do? He decided, I think, to sugar his Islamic medicine for the right in two ways. The first is by defending every action of the Bush administration in the war on terror. Even if the president's analysis of the aftermath of September 11 turns out to have been wrong, he is still always right in what he does. This cardinal rule of the religious right—the president is never actually wrong—is pursued to an almost ludicrous degree in the book. And so we learn that there has been "remarkable progress" since the invasion of Iraq: "a surge of new businesses, training of new police and military … new fire stations, an improved computer network, and the increased availability of clean water." (The fire stations are a particularly poignant touch.) He adds: "Iraq now has an elected government that does control its own military, pass its own laws, and exercise all the power provided by the constitution." Torture did not take place in Abu Ghraib, according to D'Souza; and if it did, it was solely the responsibility of the cultural left, who trained American soldiers how to dehumanize prisoners with sexual depravity on basic cable. The absurdity of all this, and its detachment from any mature grasp on reality, is not the point. This spirited and occasionally hilarious defense of all that Bush and Cheney have done is transparently a device to disarm D'Souza's own congregation. Without it, the Conservative Book Club might have balked.

The other gambit that D'Souza uses to appeal to his fellow conservatives is declaring that the real enemy is the domestic left. Here he treads on far more familiar ground. Part of the corruption of contemporary conservatism has been the way in which vast sums of money have been made by peddling books, talk shows, blogs, and magazines that do nothing but demonize "the left." The lucrative trend began in the 1990s and is now a profitable staple of Conservatism Inc. Ann Coulter has become a very rich woman by accusing her fellow Americans of being godless traitors. D'Souza's problem in this respect is not any moral qualm about maligning one's compatriots as treasonous, godless terror-lovers, but how to make the claim—how to find the right word?—*fresh*.

Finally somebody has outdone Coulter. The central claim of *The Enemy at Home* is that American liberals—not Al Qaeda—caused September 11. How precisely, one wonders, is D'Souza going to pull this one off? He concedes that it is "absurd" to accuse Americans of being directly responsible for a mass murder planned and executed by Islamist terrorists from the Middle East. Frank Rich was not in the cockpit of United Flight 93 with a box-cutter. And yet D'Souza manfully goes on to argue about (as his subtitle clearly declares) "the cultural left and its responsibility for 9/11"—and in words parsed to ensure that the charge is in no way meant unseriously.

We need to be precise here. D'Souza is not making the claim that, in some way, the cultural left was merely indifferent to the crime of September 11, seeing in it a merited blowback from America's foreign policy for the past several decades. That claim, though provocative, is not absurd. Noam Chomsky declared of the catastrophe that "for the first time, the guns have been directed the other way." Arundhati Roy described the massacre as a "monstrous calling card … signed by the ghosts of the victims of America's old wars." Much of the hard left also opposed the invasion of Afghanistan and the removal of the Taliban regime.

Now, some analysis of how this occurred—and what it revealed about the mentality of some on the left—is perfectly fair game. And in the emotional days after the destruction of the World Trade Center, there was at least as much heat as light.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I myself wrote a sloppy throwaway sentence effectively accusing such "enclaves" on the far left of being a virtual and potential "fifth column" in the coming war. I regret that ugly coinage and said so days later. Such rhetorical excesses aside, however, the underlying point about the far left's moral unmooring is still, I think, a good one.

But this, D'Souza reminds us, is not what he is arguing. That criticism is so 2002. He is making a far graver accusation against a much larger number of people. He is accusing a hefty chunk of the population, and a solid majority of its cultural elite, of witting complicity in mass murder.

IV.

D'Souza understands that this is "a strong charge, one that no one has made before." One immediately recalls the remarks of Jerry Falwell after September 11, his account of the moral and historical causes for the attack. D'Souza, too, has not forgotten them. In fact, he reprints them in order to show how, in contrast with himself, Falwell is mealymouthed. Falwell, after all, merely said the following:

> With biological warfare available to these monsters—the Husseins, the Bin Ladens, the Arafats—what we saw on Tuesday, as terrible as it is, could be minuscule if, in fact God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve.... The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked.... I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way—all of them who have tried to secularize America—I point the finger in their face and say, "you helped this happen."

Helped? This is far too weak a charge to get Doubleday to put real money behind a book. D'Souza does not believe that the cultural left "helped 9/11 happen." He believes that the cultural left *made* 9/11 happen. D'Souza, again, never speaks of God or his own faith in this book: his causality includes nothing supernatural. In his view, the cultural left "actively fostered" the murder of three thousand Westerners without any indirect assistance from the Almighty. In his words: "Thus when leading figures on the left say, 'We made them do this to us,' in a sense they are correct. They are not correct that *America* is to blame. But their statement is true in that *their* actions and *their* America are responsible for fostering Islamic anti-Americanism in general and 9/11 in particular."

To purloin a rhetorical device of the far left, it is American liberals who are, in D'Souza's eyes, the real terrorists. Bin Laden, in contrast, "is not so much a terrorist as he is a religious ideologue who has chosen terrorism as the most effective way to achieve his goals." The way to defeat terrorism is not to attack bin Laden, but to co-opt a more traditional variant of his Islamism and focus on the real enemy: liberals. And who are these people who made Al Qaeda attack America? Who, precisely, conspired in this *Dolchstoss*? D'Souza names names: Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum, Sean Wilentz, Sharon Stone, Rosie O'Donnell, Paul Begala, Arianna Huffington, many other cultural and political figures, and all the members and employees of the ACLU, Amnesty International, the Ford Foundation, and on and on. All of these people, D'Souza argues, caused September 11 "in particular."

Once you have absorbed the specificity of the charge, the reality sinks in. September 11 is not merely a symbol, after all. It was the last day in the lives of thousands of innocent people. For those on D'Souza's list who live in New York City—and many of them do—D'Souza is making the accusation that they were actually complicit in the killing of their neighbors, forcing them to jump to their deaths or face incineration, murdering mothers and fathers, slaughtering businessmen and secretaries and commuters going about their daily lives. This charge in its grotesque specificity is, quite obviously, obscene, and it is quite unanswerable, in the way that all Big Lies are unanswerable. I would have liked to believe that they are also unpublishable. But here is this Big Lie published and marketed by Doubleday, and edited by Adam Bellow.

It is only when you grasp the ambition of D'Souza's project that you realize why he went for the jugular in this spectacularly offensive way. He can't really believe the charge on the cover of his book. No sane person can. (It is D'Souza's sanity that makes you despise him so much. He knows the game.) Even if one were to concede the notion that Western feminism, secularism, and free speech may have alienated many traditional Muslims and made them more receptive to the poison of Islamist terror, it does not follow that American leftists are actually responsible for September 11. That is why D'Souza feels constrained to insert a largely irrelevant chapter detailing the consequences of the policies of Carter and Clinton in emboldening the terrorist enemy by years of weakness and appeasement. Of course, even this indictment doesn't quite wash: twelve years of Republican presidents followed the Khomeini revolution; a Republican president withdrew all troops from Lebanon in 1982 after a terrorist attack; and a Republican president was in the White House when Al Qaeda struck. If Islamism was allowed to grow through American neglect, there is enough blame to spread around.

No, D'Souza framed his call for a globalized theoconservatism with this incendiary obscenity for other reasons. First and foremost, he wanted to gin up Pavlovian liberal shock. "Let the debate begin!" screamed the online ads. Alan Wolfe in *The New York Times Book Review* dutifully obliged, decrying the book's very existence and calling on decent conservatives to disown it. This act of attempted "censorship" in turn gave queasy conservatives an opportunity to defend their favored son, and helped persuade the base that the book was legit. Bingo! It's on the *New York Times* best-seller list. In this contrived way, Wolfe's scorn was worth a thousand ads.

D'Souza's character references in this are revealing. William F. Buckley Jr. and George Gilder, titans of the conservative intellectual establishment, united to defend their protégé. "D'Souza is a lively and curious, independent and scholarly young man," Buckley wrote to the editors of the *Book Review*. "As commander-in-chief of decent and honorable American conservatives, I take this occasion to overrule Wolfe's reprobation, and to advise him to curb his inclination to act as universal censor for the book-reading world." Buckley was able to write this while confessing he hadn't actually read the book!

Wolfe gave the anti-anti-D'Souza writers their moment. In *The Weekly Standard*, Peter Berkowitz, while not defending D'Souza, accused Wolfe of wielding an equally broad brush by describing many conservatives as followers of Carl Schmitt. Gilder went one step further and embraced the central message of the book as true, even vital, thus achieving one of D'Souza's

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main goals—to legitimize the whole notion of a Christianist-Islamist global alliance as a mainstream, if new, idea.

And when you read Gilder's torrent of angry words, you can indeed hear echoes of a growing chorus on the right, one that will surely only increase in volume if defeat in Iraq expels the Republicans into the political wilderness for a generation. Gilder writes: "D'Souza raises the alarm that the anti-religious, sexual liberationist, anti-natalist and feminist thrust of American foreign, cultural, and free-speech global Internet policies threaten and estrange all the traditional cultures of the third world, whether Muslim or Christian, Hindu or Buddhist." And he continues:

> Poor people cannot afford the epidemics, abortions and divorces of Hollywood liberalism, and uphold a monotheist God as the foundation of their moral codes and worthy of respect. The American global cultural campaign pushes a billion non-militant Muslims to condone the jihad and thus threatens the existence of Israel and the survival of vulnerable American cities like New York. Perhaps your readers would be intrigued with a discussion of the argument rather than anathemas against its expression. To call the book McCarthyite and a "national scandal" will neither stop the jihad nor save Israel in a nuclear age.

D'Souza, it appears, is not the first person to have this idea. Gilder got the point immediately. The decadence of the West is not a new theme on the right. Nor is D'Souza's assertion that Islam's superiority to "liberal morality" is proved by birthrates. The argument that Muslim fertility rates are proof of Muslims' cultural superiority is the theme of one of the more vulgar right-wing tracts now on the bookshelves, *America Alone* by Mark Steyn. The notion that the mere existence of a secular pop culture threatens traditional morality is widespread on the religious right. All D'Souza has done is to broaden the argument from one in which the secular left poisons America's airwaves into one in which it poisons the *world's* airwaves: cultural imperialism, conservative style.

As D'Souza continues his campaign in op-eds, speaking engagements, and television appearances, you can see the coherence of his case. There is a difference only in degree, after all, between Islamism's view of the role of women and that of James Dobson or Tim LaHaye. Very, very few women control any religious institutions on the religious right. Patriarchy rules there as it rules in Pakistan. There is only a difference in degree between Islamism's view of the relationship between mosque and state and Christianism's view of the relationship between church and state. If law cannot be neutral between competing moral ideals, and if it must reflect God's will regardless of the views of religious minorities, then you can see why D'Souza is so affronted by Turkey's secularism, and why he sees the Declaration of Independence as an essentially religious document. Any space for non-believers is, in the Islamist and Christianist view, an assault on belief itself. The notion that blasphemy, pornography, or homosexuality should be protected, let alone celebrated, is anathema to Islamists and Christianists alike. D'Souza's sole sin is to say so publicly in a way no one can misunderstand. He has blown the medievals' cover.

• • •

And so D'Souza forges on, and the occasional sharp attack from the libertarian right serves only to advance his credibility with the religious base. So far his book has not seemed to hurt his career, or to damage his reputation among movement conservatives. D'Souza reports that he is scheduled to speak at the Council for National Policy, and he recently spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference, the Republican Leadership Conference, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. Late last year he was a speaker on *National Review*'s fund-raising cruise. David Horowitz's *FrontPage* magazine held a lunch for D'Souza following the publication of his book. (D'Souza told me he had a "very positive reaction.") The Federalist Society invited him to speak at Pepperdine Law School, after which D'Souza was the convocation speaker. He recently spoke at a Hillsdale College donors event in Florida, to a crowd of five hundred. D'Souza has also been given a regular column at *Townhall.com*, the online clearinghouse for conservative writers. *National Review Online* has allowed him to respond to his conservative critics on its site.

None of this should be particularly surprising at this moment in the evolution of American conservatism. The movement is now centrally dedicated to the proposition that secularism is the primary enemy, that a neutral public square is a pernicious illusion, that faith of any kind is always and everywhere preferable to no faith or sincere doubt, that the distinction between religion and politics is at heart a false one. Its problem, however, is that it is also dedicated to a war against the most violent form of theocratic politics in recent decades, in the shape of Islamist terror. How

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to fight theocracy abroad while sustaining and celebrating the enmeshment of church and state at home? It is a paradox that is leading America's conservatives and Republicans into a dead end of their own choosing, into a war they seem to be losing on both the home front and abroad.

The real significance, the only significance, of D'Souza's book is that it offers the army of the saints a radical and new way out—a last desperate bid to rescue what is beginning to look like a doomed adventure. Given the radical transformation of American conservatism in the last six years, the idea of fusing Islamism and Christianism on a global stage is not such a surprising development. It remains a long shot, of course. Some leaders of the religious right are not as cynical as D'Souza. Some even believe in their God more than they believe in their conservatism. Others on the right still remember a conservatism rooted in individual autonomy, limited government, religious freedom, and cultural optimism—not in faith-based big government and civilizational despair.

In some ways, though, D'Souza's global synthesis must be tempting. It deeply enrages the liberals whom conservatives now exist to enrage. And it is the obvious logical next step toward severing conservatism from its roots in the post-Enlightenment world and welding it permanently to an older, premodern vision of mankind and religion. Whether the right decides to resolve its own contradictions by choosing this promising but dark global path is anyone's guess. But they want to win the war that they are currently losing. One response is to broaden the enemy and change the rules. If that means an attack on America itself, so be it. These are "core beliefs" we are talking about, and some of them run deeper than patriotism.◆

Gretchen Morgenson
WORKING GIRLS

NO SEAT AT THE TABLE: HOW CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND LAW KEEP WOMEN OUT OF THE BOARDROOM
By Douglas M. Branson
(New York University Press, 239 pp., $40)

SELLING WOMEN SHORT: GENDER AND MONEY ON WALL STREET
By Louise Marie Roth
(Princeton University Press, 269 pp., $27.95)

OPTING OUT?: WHY WOMEN REALLY QUIT CAREERS AND HEAD HOME
By Pamela Stone
(University of California Press, 288 pp., $24.95)

Differences of opinion make the world go around, and most of us are grateful for them. Two investors looking at the same stock are content to draw opposing conclusions on its merits. Two financial analysts scanning identical data can make compelling cases on the economy, one bullish, one bearish. One reviewer predicts that a movie will be a hit, while another says it will flop. But when it comes to the subject of women in business, the discussion is so one-sided that it hardly qualifies as a debate. Thirty years after women began migrating to the business world in large numbers, the dreary drumbeat from many quarters remains the same. Glass ceilings, family-unfriendly companies, men's-club mentalities: all contribute to a bias against women that persists in spite of anti-discrimination laws that are decades old.

Or such is the message of these new books. They all argue that an anti-female view has become ingrained in corporations, on Wall Street, and in boardrooms. Today's discrimination is different, they say: no longer personal, such as sexual harassment by a superior or macho banter by colleagues, it is now faceless and institutionalized. When women fail, it is not so much because individuals hampered them, but because "the system" or "the culture" did. The discrimination is less titillating, but more pervasive.

Is this right? Does it adequately account for the nation's vast, protean workplace, and for the numbers of women in high-level jobs? Or is it a handy argument for some women to explain away their own career disappointments? Viewing women as victims of discrimination certainly seems to ignore the considerable progress that women have made in recent years across a wide swath of business. And it seems incongruent in a year when a woman is running for president of the United States, the newly elected speaker of the House of Representatives is a woman, and the new president of Harvard is a woman.

The victim view also discounts the considerably richer choices that the workplace now offers women, many of whom would gladly trade off the executive-suite chase for more time with their families. How many potential female CEO's have exited the race because they simply did not think the possible rewards of an unrelenting corporate climb were worth the sacrifice of family relationships? Or as Claudia Goldin, an economist at Harvard who has written extensively about women's work, told *The New York Times* in December, "Do we want everyone to have an equal chance to work 80 hours in their prime reproductive years? Yes, but we don't expect them to take that chance equally often."

Or do we? Many of those arguing that discrimination in the ranks of American capitalism remains a deeply structural problem for women today begin by rejecting the idea that choice has anything to do with the disappointingly small number of women running corporations or holding board seats. When women leave their careers to become full-time mothers, these authors maintain, they do so solely as a result of pressure from the workplace. Similarly, there is no allowance for women who choose not to climb the ladder past a certain point because they want to have time with their families. Women making these choices may not know it, but they are at the mercy of institutionalized discrimination.

This is a sort of retro-feminism, stuck in a place that has not been the reality for decades. The universe that they describe does not resemble even the one that I encountered on Wall Street during the early 1980s, when I was a stockbroker at a large New York City brokerage firm. Back then, women were genuine minorities at these firms; but even so, my experience was one of an industry offering unadulterated opportunity. Stress and pressure to perform were a constant. Frat-house behavior was annoyingly common. But discrimination? Not in my experience, even during what can only be considered the Stone Age for women on Wall Street.

• • •

These days, few topics stir more emotion than the question of women's progress—or otherwise—in business. Personal decisions made by women in the career/family balance are viewed through

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a highly politicized prism. Married women who jump off the fast track, becoming homemakers and mothers, are said to be selling out their sisters and aiding the enemy in the battle for equality. Indeed, Pamela Stone said she set out to write *Opting Out?* to offer a response to stories in the popular media that trumpeted "a so-called trend of high-achieving women 'returning home' since the 1980s, a trend depicted primarily as a function of women's changing preferences and choices."

When high-level female executives fail in this polarized environment, their flameouts are said to hurt all women toiling on the road to the corner suite or boardroom. (Think of Carly Fiorina, the former chief executive at Hewlett-Packard, and probably the most renowned of all the alleged casualties of corporate misogyny.) Women fired for incompetence are often characterized as victims, not as perpetrators of mismanagement that may harm a company's workers and shareholders.

That women still get (or get away with) victim status seems to belie the great headway they have made in business, even in traditionally male-dominated fields. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2005, for example, found that women made up 52 percent of financial managers and 62 percent of accountants and auditors. And a 2003 study by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of roughly 1,400 companies with 100 or more employees and federal contractors with 50 or more employees found that women made up 33.7 percent of officials and managers of securities and commodities firms. Women accounted for 29.5 percent of officials and managers at 637 investment banks (a subset of the larger figure), and females totaled 48.6 percent of officials and managers at 3,908 commercials banks. At 900 accounting firms, 38 percent of officials were women.

The numbers of women plummet, however, when it comes to executive suites and corporate boardrooms. Only 2 percent of Fortune 1000 companies are overseen by female chief executives, and in 2005 Douglas Branson's researchers found only 568 female directors sitting in 5,161 board seats at Fortune 500 companies. Around 12 percent of those companies did not have a single female director, and 29 percent had only one woman on their board, Branson reports. Figures such as these make his book the most compelling and credible of the three. Branson argues that women do not make it to the boardroom because those responsible for nominating directors—board committees and top executives, who are mostly male—conclude that women's personalities and cultural backgrounds do not suit the demands of a directorship. "The model's paradigm is a standup, ruggedly individualistic director (male) who will remove an underperforming CEO or file a lawsuit when he has to," Branson writes. "Women may not have the right qualities, or may be perceived that way, in part because those qualities may not be as apparent in women as in men." And so women do not get the nod.

The dearth of women in the boardroom is certainly discouraging. Branson ends his book with recommendations for how women can change their behavior to get noticed by nominating committees. But do the boardroom figures signify broad-based systematic discrimination in corporate America? Perhaps not. There is no doubt that sex discrimination has not been eradicated from all workplaces. More disturbing, recent studies show a widening pay gap between men and women with equivalent credentials and experience. These pay differences may be an anomaly, but they surprise many social scientists and anger hardworking women.

But measuring the depth of discrimination against women is far trickier than assessing the pay gap between males and females. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who argue that women remain under assault often fail to support the thesis with rigorous quantitative research. Instead, many base their conclusions on anecdotal and "qualitative" studies that take the experiences of a handful of women and apply them to the general population.

Arguing that discrimination continues to thwart women even as it has morphed from the personal to the institutional may be something that some women want to hear. Knowing that it is not just your boss who is out to get you but an entire institution can explain away a good deal of disappointment. But pointing to broad-based conspiracies is not likely to help women to navigate everyday career shoals or to achieve a meaningful balance between work and family. The fact that some talented and ambitious women might lower their sights after reading these books makes them even a little pernicious. Then again, women who have gone places in business usually have not done so by whining about discrimination or bias.

Wall Street, with its rich rewards and its picaresque characters, is one of the crucial workplaces where discrimination has become subtler, according to Louise Marie Roth. Blatant, boorish behavior by Cro-Magnon males has been replaced, she contends, by a more muted bias that creates "endemic firm- and industry-wide discrimination against women and minorities." This type of discrimination "does not rest on individual acts of meanness, in which some people consciously limit the opportunities of women, but on the interpersonal and organizational dynamics that subtly and often unintentionally re-create inequality."

And Pamela Stone looks at the broader world of business to draw a similar conclusion. Women who leave the workforce to raise their children are not doing so by choice, she argues, but because their hidebound organizations prevent them from managing both work and family life, and their husbands are unwilling to step in as stay-at-home parents. "Married to fellow professionals, who face the same pressures at work that they do, women are home alone," she writes, "and go home because they have been unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain flexibility or, for those who were able to, because they found themselves marginalized and stigmatized, negatively reinforced for trying to hold on to their careers after becoming mothers."

In both books, the conclusions are sweeping, but the samples used to warrant them are not. To anyone truly interested in plumbing the problem of discrimination against women in the workplace, perceptions and anecdotes often prove little. Roth and Stone base their pronouncements on interviews with a relatively small number of people, all of whom have been assigned false names. Roth interviewed seventy-six people—forty-four women and thirty-two men. Her group, she said, consisted of elite MBA graduates who began their careers at top Wall Street firms in the early 1990s. These men and women graduated between 1991 and 1993 and were from similar backgrounds with like credentials. The interviews took place in 1998 and early 1999 and included complete career histories from these people before they received their MBA degrees. Stone spoke with fifty-four women for her book, using what she describes as "the intensive life history interview." From these discussions, she takes the reader through the "trajectory of these women's lives" and their decisions to leave the workforce. "The exits of highly talented women are the miners' canary," Stone concludes, "a front-line indication that something is seriously amiss in too many workplaces."

Real-world stories from people such as "Kate Hadley," a thirty-nine-year-old mother of three children with an MBA from Wharton and a big job at a consumer-

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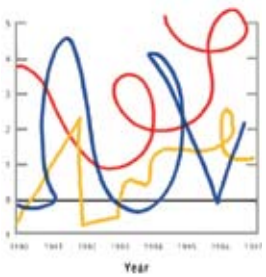
goods company, and "Elizabeth Brand," a forty-year-old pregnant mother of one who was a rising management consultant, make *Opting Out?* exceedingly readable. But its liveliness should not disguise the limitations of its analysis. Like *Selling Women Short*, it gives only one side of these women's stories. Never is the reader told how the people who worked around these women—whether as bosses, peers, or subordinates—rated their performances. There is no reality check; there is only the sympathetic credulity of the interviewer. But an individual's own views on her (or his) career trajectory are almost certainly distorted. The question is by how much.

An anecdote in *Selling Women Short* furnishes a fine illustration of the problem. It describes how "Mia," a research analyst, was fired by her Wall Street firm after she had her first baby and when she was expecting another. While "Mia" described the circumstances surrounding her termination as discrimination, any other factors that might have been at work are not discussed. Roth writes only that "for eighteen months after her first child was born, she worked long hours and traveled a lot, getting up at 5:30 every morning, working until 5:00, and then doing additional work at home after her child went to sleep. But her peers and managers still resented her and her firm fired her. This solidified her decision to leave the labor force."

In *Opting Out?*, the marriages of Stone's interviewees are central to her thesis that women are not given the chance to stay in the workforce because their husbands' careers come first. And yet the husbands are not heard from. Instead, most of these men are described as continuing their careers without missing a beat; and by encouraging their wives to step off the fast track, they became a big factor in the women's decisions to leave the workplace. Failing to support wives who wanted to keep working made these men part of the problem, Stone argues. There is a lot of "she said," but there is no "he said."

Even the men who let their wives choose whether to keep working are obstacles, according to Stone. "'It's your choice' was code for 'It's your problem,'" she writes. "Veiled behind the seemingly egalitarian rhetoric of 'support' and 'choice,' husbands were in effect giving their wives permission to quit their careers, and signaling at the same time that women's careers were not worthwhile enough to merit any behavioral changes on their (the husbands') part." That women and men might experience a different reality in such situations is a major methodological, even philosophical, problem with these books. Differences of opinion are, after all, central to the battle between the sexes.



Consider, for example, the gaps between male and female views on pay equity as indicated by a study called "Report to Women in Capital Markets," which was published in 2005 by Catalyst, an organization that analyzes women in the workforce. Respondents in the study were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with several questions. One question was this: are women and men paid comparable salaries for similar work? Some 26 percent of women agreed, compared with 67 percent of men.

Another Catalyst study, "Women in Financial Services: The Word on the Street," also found deep differences between men and women on several issues. For instance, 65 percent of women in the study reported that they must work harder than men to get the same rewards, while only 13 percent of men agreed with the statement. And while 51 percent of women reported that they are paid less than men for doing similar work, only 8 percent of men agreed. Some 42 percent of women said clients and projects were fairly assigned within their firms, while 55 percent of men said so. Interestingly, men and women agreed on only one topic: 57 percent of both men and women are unsatisfied with their ability to control their work schedules.

Roth's book also suffers from a naïveté about cycles in the financial markets that can help to determine success or failure in a career. Roth claims that men were more likely to do better on Wall Street because they specialized in "higher-revenue industries like natural resources, technology, or financial institutions while women were more likely to specialize in lower-revenue areas like emerging markets." But in recent years, emerging markets have been an amazing growth engine that would have produced enormous bonuses for almost anyone involved in them. (Some of Roth's assumptions are downright amusing. Thus she allows that the way in which accounts were distributed to salespeople could contribute to "a gender gap in pay in sales and trading" if the allocation of accounts were unfair. Then she quotes "Barbara," who said that her experience with account allocation was that it was "unfairly biased toward people who were verbally demanding—who tended to be men.")

Both Roth and Stone lean heavily on old data. For instance, in a section of *Selling Women Short* that deals with how women interacted with clients, Roth argues that Wall Street executives hired people that they assumed their firms' clients would prefer—which is to say, white males. Yet one of the studies cited as bolstering this view was published in 1990, meaning that its data were collected even earlier. While there is some of this statistical antiquity in Branson's book—it relies on a 1987 study in its discussions of biases against women whose husbands work—it also presents plenty of original and current research on women in boardrooms.

Some of the examples that Roth and Stone cite as evidence of institutionalized discrimination tend to undermine their arguments. Stone, for instance, recounts the story of "Dorothy Lennon," a banker whose boss told her that she would not receive a bonus when she was pregnant because he expected her to be sick a lot. Dorothy appealed to her human resources department, Stone wrote, which "came down hard on him, but the episode signaled to [Dorothy] that pregnancy was a hot-button subject." Couldn't the reaction of the human resources department instead have signaled the commitment of the corporation to stamp out such gross male behavior?

Roth describes a situation in which one of her female Wall Street subjects was at a client meeting accompanied by a high-level executive from her firm. One of her colleagues had not come to the meeting because she was pregnant. "Damned women. Always getting pregnant," muttered the Wall Street executive, according to the anecdote. Later, the client at the meeting told the executive that his behavior was offensive and took away the business from the firm. But instead of evidence that the world is changing, this anecdote in Roth's hands illustrated "the blatant hostility that managers could have toward pregnant workers and how it created an inhospitable work environment for all women."

As for Stone, even when most of her subjects insist that they had made the choice to stay home, she refuses to accept their views. The rhetoric of choice, Stone writes, "often had the effect of obscuring or rendering invisible to them the constraints they faced and under which their decisions were actually carried out." Why

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conduct interviews if you are not listening to what your subjects say?

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Stone ends her book with prescriptions for more flexibility in the workplace and other solutions that would allow women to balance work and family better. She suggests that companies "destigmatize" part-time work and "challenge" the long-hour culture. These are nice ideas, but to anyone who has worked for a public company recently, they are not realistic.

Branson makes a better argument for how corporate boards can improve their companies' performance by embracing women. Monitoring corporate management, a duty of directors who represent shareholders, can best be done by achieving a greater balance in the boardroom, he writes. Diversity of views, says Branson, "is necessary to avoid the perils of 'groupthink' in appointing a C.E.O. or a C.F.O., and in strategic planning." Among other perils, groupthink causes "the board to avoid hard questions or otherwise rock the boat," leading to a sense of invincibility and isolation. The point is not that women or minorities will always help boards avoid these shoals, Branson wisely adds. "The point is that groupthink is less likely in the presence of diversity and with diversity as an avowed goal."

How to achieve this end? Branson proposes that every public company could put a woman on its nominating committee. Also, boards should get rid of directors who sit on more than three public-company boards, thereby opening up the number of director slots available to women. Women must also make themselves more attractive to boards, he suggests. He advises women to take a less direct route to the top: teaching or taking a high-level position at a nonprofit organization may lead to the boardroom. "There is no one paradigm for advancement of women," he writes. "The paradigm mutates as a woman's career advances, much more so than a man's." As a result, a woman might have to be aggressive early on, and then transform herself into a stateswoman. Finally, Branson asserts, she may have to become more aggressive again, as she climbs the ladder. It is an interesting thesis, one that makes sense.

At least toward the end of her book, Roth becomes more nuanced and more sensible, reflecting that women's limited progress on Wall Street may be related to forces other than discrimination. She concedes that "gender equity might be achievable in highly demanding jobs if it were not for work-family issues that disproportionately affect women." Yes, indeed—and perhaps because women choose to let family issues take precedence.

Roth's book becomes much more satisfying in its final chapters, where it recounts the strategies women devised to succeed on Wall Street. Examples included identifying a mentor and pursuing jobs where productivity is tangible and undeniable. This meant working in fields in which their contributions could be measured—such as on trading desks, where they had their own profit-and-loss responsibilities—and choosing industries where they would be evaluated more on production and less on subjective criteria such as client relationships.

It is not until the next-to-last page of the book that readers learn that one-quarter of the Wall Street women in Roth's sample succeeded "within this system by its own standards." Their experiences, the author noted, "demonstrate that the glass ceiling is not impermeable." But such a notion may not sell books. Better to portray "systematic inequality" than actual existing women in all their complexity. American business is now riddled with stories of women shattering barriers. There is still some way to go, obviously; but an essential part of progress is learning to take yes for an answer. ◆

Cass R. Sunstein and Richard H. Thaler
THE SURVIVAL OF THE FATTEST

MINDLESS EATING: WHY WE EAT MORE THAN WE THINK
By Brian Wansink
(Bantam, 276 pp., $25)

I.

The idea of "the survival of the fittest" is one of the most powerful organizing principles in all of science. That simple idea, stated by Herbert Spencer on the basis of Charles Darwin's work and later endorsed by Darwin himself, captures the theory of evolution, the process of natural selection, and a host of associated notions. And yet the phrase can produce confusion. Some people think that survival of the fittest implies that species will be ever improving, and that those still around today will be well-designed machines, smart, efficient, and, well, "fit." But Darwin was focused on reproductive success, and nothing in his work suggests that surviving species are particularly smart or, in any global sense, fit.

A visit to Darwin's beloved Galápagos Islands drives this point home. The famous blue-footed booby got its name because of its apparent stupidity. The bird would land on the decks of sailing ships and allow itself to be captured with a lunge from a drunken sailor. (On the islands the birds have essentially no predators and thus no need to be wary.) The giant tortoises are slow-footed, and if they are flipped over onto their backs they have no way of righting themselves. (They never had to cope with teenage boys.) And many of the Galápagos species lean to the chubby side. Bull sea lions have figures resembling NFL nose tackles and can weigh more than eight hundred pounds. The waved albatross can fly enormous distances and withstand very cold water, but it has enough padding that it cannot get airborne without the aid of a wind or a cliff. On a calm day, even a running (er, waddling) start is not enough for it to attain lift-off.

Yet all these animals have survived because they were well-suited to their environment—as long as that environment did not change. The giant tortoises were wiped out on some of the islands because of the introduction of two new species brought by human beings. Goats were faster at eating the grasses favored by the tortoises, and rats (who seem to follow people everywhere) soon acquired a taste for tortoise eggs. Tortoises were as slow and large as ever (they can live for months without food or water), but they were no longer fit enough. In an unchanging environment, natural selection can lead to the survival of the fattest. But if things change, the fat can be in big trouble.

Which brings us to the current state of the American waistline. Over the past few decades, many Americans have grown fat and are growing fatter. More than 27 percent of us are obese. This is a genuine personal and social problem, because obesity is associated with heart disease, diabetes, and many other life-

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threatening conditions. Why are so many Americans fat? At one level the explanation is rather simple. We gain weight when we consume more calories than we burn. So any theory for why we are gaining weight has to explain why we are eating more, exercising less, or both. A traditional economic argument would be based on rational calculations and technological change. Innovations in packaging, preserving, and cooking have greatly decreased the time it takes to prepare food. And if you lower the cost of something, rational consumers will buy more of it. American consumers eat more, and more often, than they did fifty years ago. Technology has also made it easier for us to avoid exercise. Many of us ride an elevator down to our car, drive to work, and then ride another elevator up to our office. The most strenuous exercise we exert is at the keyboard, or hoisting a glass. According to this view, obesity is a rational choice. When faced with the choice of swapping a Big Mac for an apple or climbing the stairs instead of riding, some people buy a larger pair of pants instead.

Another approach, favored by behavioral economists, stresses issues of self-control. According to this view, our environment has changed in a way that presents us with increasing temptations. When tempted to pop corn in the 1950s, consumers had to get out the pot and start popping. Now the microwave produces popcorn nearly instantly. Fast-food restaurants, convenience stores, and packaged food have all made sticking to a diet more difficult. This argument strengthens and reinforces the standard economic analysis, but it adds the idea that people would, in some sense, prefer to be thinner. The billions of dollars that consumers spend on diet books and self-help programs such as Weight Watchers lend credence to the claim that people are conflicted about their weight gain, whereas in a purely rational world, choosing to be plump would be a simple choice, no more conflicting than choosing to wear a blue hat.

While technological changes and self-control problems are undoubtedly part of the story, Brian Wansink adds an important additional piece of the puzzle. On the basis of dozens of experiments conducted by his team and others, Wansink has concluded that much eating is mindless. Americans are fat not because they have made a rational calculation that French fries are so yummy that they are worth the costs in health and svelte. Nor are French fries essentially irresistible. Often Americans eat because of contextual cues, or "hidden persuaders," to which they are blind, but which greatly affect their behavior. And though *Mindless Eating* is partly a diet book, it is not just for the chubby any more than Michael Lewis's *Moneyball* was just for baseball fans. Wansink's real subject is choosing, not eating, so even thin people should read it.

Wansink begins with the premise that we don't know much about what makes us eat. Often we overeat food that we do not even like, simply because of the context in which we find ourselves. All this happens unconsciously. "In the thousands of debriefings we've done for hundreds of studies, nearly every person who was 'tricked' by the words on a label, the size of a package, the lighting in a room, or the size of a latte said, 'I wasn't influenced by that.'" Wansink calculates that people make more than two hundred food-related decisions every day; most of those decisions are made quickly and intuitively, without any kind of deliberate assessment. As he puts it, "stomachs can't count," and "it's simply not in our nature to pause after every bite and contemplate whether we're full."

This argument is not original to Wansink. The psychologists Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson convincingly argued more than two decades ago that people often lack much insight into why they do things, such as buy a certain brand of automobile or beer. When asked, "Why did you do that?" people have no trouble providing answers, but their answers often turn out to be wrong, and they have no more validity than the ones that an outside observer could give. (For example, people sometimes say that they chose one product over another because it looked better, when the two products actually were identical.) Wansink shows that people frequently have little or no idea why they eat so much.

The initial problem is that if we see food, we are likely to eat it, even if we aren't hungry. People tend to eat whatever is put in front of them. Wansink demonstrates this point through a series of somewhat mischievous experiments, some of which would have been great material for *Candid Camera*. A few years ago, moviegoers in Chicago found themselves with a free bucket of popcorn. Unfortunately, the popcorn was stale; it had been popped five days earlier and stored so as to ensure that it would actually squeak when eaten. People were not specifically informed of its staleness, but they didn't love the popcorn. As one moviegoer said, "It was like eating Styrofoam packing peanuts."

As the experiment was designed, about half of the moviegoers received a big bucket of popcorn and half received a medium-sized bucket. After the movie, Wansink asked the recipients of the big bucket whether they might have eaten more because of the size of their bucket. Most denied the possibility, saying, "Things like that don't trick me." But they were wrong. On average, recipients of the big bucket ate about 53 percent more popcorn—even though they didn't really like it.

Another experiment required some special equipment. People sat down to a

The Shivers

For Auden's centenary, at his former home, the East Village, New York

Birthday boy, you would have had to dine
Round about now, to be in bed by nine,
To snuggle down in this city wired with light,
Ridiculously early for the night,
Seeming to hear it briefly hush its noise,
As if indulging its adopted schoolboy's
Crazy schedule.
Far away from home,
Five hours into the dark our funny kingdom
Sleeps, from that other York where you were born,
To the childhood fields and every prep-school dorm
You sat awake in, lecturing your chums
About the universe, among the cake-crumbs.

Perhaps you hit the sack at the height of play
Because they did, three thousand miles away
And thirty years before; perhaps the bright
Dream this city is was the only night-light
Strong enough to soothe; perhaps your work
Began when you looked up from your dashed-off homework
Over the fields and found yourself alone
Out there, watching the windows one by one
Cave into dark till there was only this:
Time with the shivers, thinking of timelessness.

GLYN MAXWELL

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large bowl of Campbell's tomato soup and were told to eat as much as they wanted. Unbeknown to them, the soup bowls were designed to refill themselves (with empty bottoms connected to machinery beneath the table). No matter how much soup the subjects ate, the bowl never emptied. Many people just kept eating until the experiment was (mercifully) ended.

The general rule seems to be, "Give them a lot, and they eat a lot." Those who receive large bowls of ice cream eat much more than those who get small bowls. If you are given a half-pound bag of M&M's, chances are that you will eat about half as much as you will if you are given a one-pound bag. The reason is simple: packages "suggest a consumption norm—what it is appropriate or normal to use or eat." In fact, most people do not stop eating when they are no longer hungry. They look to whether their glasses or plates are empty. Those who keep a great deal of food in their refrigerator eat far more than those who do not. (An evident trick for dieters is to buy less each time you go to the grocery store, even if the result is that you go to the grocery store more often. Even better, walk to the store!)

• • •

Size operates as a hidden persuader, but it is hardly the only one. Names matter a lot. "Traditional Cajun Red Beans With Rice" is far more popular than "Red Beans with Rice." You might well order "Home-Style Chicken Parmesan," even if you would turn up your nose at mere "Chicken Parmesan." People aren't terribly enthusiastic about "Zucchini Cookies," but they will happily eat "Grandma's Zucchini Cookies." Not only are people more likely to ask for, and to eat, appealingly named dishes; they will also rate those dishes as tastier. Those who have had restaurant items with the foregoing names are more likely to describe their meals as "great" or "fantastic." The right names for dishes can even produce more enthusiastic attitudes toward restaurants as a whole, leading people to characterize them as "trendy and up-to-date." Wansink thinks that if restaurants without particularly good food seek to increase sales, they might choose from a range of effective labels, including the geographic ("Kansas City Barbeque"), the nostalgic ("Classic Old-World Manicotti"), and the sensory ("Hearty Sizzling Steaks"). In this way, Wansink helps to systematize what savvy advertisers already know.

It is healthy to eat soy, and you can lose weight by selecting soy products, but efforts to market those products have fared pretty badly. Why? A big reason is that people have a bad association with the word "soy." In one of Wansink's experiments, a number of people were asked to eat a new PowerBar, prominently labeled with the words "Contains 10 grams of protein." Other people, not different from the first group, were asked to eat the same PowerBar, prominently labeled with the words "Contains 10 grams of soy protein." Members of the first group liked what they ate; they described it as chewy, tasty, and chocolaty. Members of the second group were not so pleased. Many spat out the bar. Many others asked, after the first bite, if they could have a drink of water. Those who knew that they had eaten "soy protein" said that the bars had a bad aftertaste and "didn't even taste like chocolate."

Wansink's lesson is that "we taste what we expect we'll taste." To support this claim, he notes that in the dark, people are willing to believe that chocolate yogurt is strawberry yogurt—and apparently to enjoy it just as if it were strawberry. A military chef found himself with a group of sailors who were tired of eating lemon Jell-O and insisted on getting their favorite flavor, which was cherry. Not having any such Jell-O, he colored lemon-flavored Jell-O red—and the sailors ate it happily. Indeed, even many wine connoisseurs cannot tell the difference between red and white wine when the wine is served in dark, opaque stemware.

Social influences also have a large impact. An especially good way to gain weight is to have dinner with other people. On average, those who eat with one other person eat about 35 percent more than they do when they are alone; members of a group of four eat about 75 percent more; those in groups of seven or more eat 96 percent more. We are also greatly influenced by consumption norms within the relevant group. A light eater eats much more in a group of heavy eaters. A heavy eater will show more restraint in a light-eating group. The group average thus exerts a significant influence. But there are gender differences as well. Women often eat less on dates; men tend to eat a lot more, apparently with the belief that women are impressed by a lot of manly eating. (Note to men: they aren't.)

When it is even modestly less convenient to get food, people will eat less of it, and sometimes much less. If the candy in people's offices is made only slightly harder to reach, their candy consumption drops. If people have to open a lid to get to the ice cream in a freezer chest, they will eat a lot less ice cream than they will if the lid is open. If almonds are in shells, overweight people are much less likely to eat them than if they have already been shelled. In this light, it is easy for cafeterias to exploit the effects of seemingly small changes in convenience. When people are asked to go to a separate lunch line to pay for candy and potato chips, they buy a lot less.

Smells, sounds, and sights are important too. It turns out that if oatmeal is served in a bowl manufactured to smell like cinnamon and raisins, people eat a lot more oatmeal. But if the bowl is engineered to smell like macaroni and cheese, oatmeal becomes pretty unappealing. When the background music is pleasant and slow, people stay a lot longer and drink a lot more; in one study, soft music was worth 41 percent more in drink revenues per table. By contrast, fast-food restaurants, seeking rapid turnover, "decorate for speed eating: bright lights, lots of hard surfaces that reflect lots of noise, and a high contrast, high arousal yellow-and-red color scheme." Sensible restaurants decide on the optimal tradeoff between lingering diners, who might well consume more, and faster but more numerous diners. Once they have made their choice, they can offer contextual cues that will lead people in their preferred directions.

Wansink's emphasis on hidden persuaders and on the mindless character of much eating leads him to wonder about the widespread idea that the best response to obesity and poor diet is to provide informational labels. If people eat mindlessly, what exactly will they learn from such labels? To answer that question, Wansink conducted a little study of how much people know about their meals at Subway and at McDonald's. Subway restaurants are pervaded by information; nutritional data can be found on posters, cups, napkins, and tray liners. If you eat at Subway, you will have easy and immediate access to information about the contents of the various options. And with its extensive advertising campaign, Subway has tried to convince people to go there for nutritious, low-calorie meals. But McDonald's is very different. While nutritional information is available, it is not prominently displayed; few people choose McDonald's in the hope of getting a low-calorie meal. So it is not surprising that McDonald's customers do not know much about the nutritional value of their meals. Of 250 patrons at McDonald's, Wansink found that only 57 had even a crude recollection of any nutritional information. On average, the

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250 diners consumed nearly 1,100 calories apiece, but they estimated that they had eaten only 876—25 percent less than reality. (This finding is not unusual: people of normal weight think that they eat 20 percent less than they actually do, and obese people are even more optimistic.)

What about the Subway customers who have been bombarded with nutritional information? In some ways the Subway customers seemed far more knowledgeable, as 157 of 250 Subway diners recalled some nutrition information. But most of the Subway group, including those 157, did not seem to pay much attention to that information. In general, they "ignored the low-fat sandwiches and stampeded straight to the high-calorie ones with meatballs, cold cuts, and bacon." They also ate a lot of cheese, mayonnaise, chips, and cookies. True, the average diner at Subway consumed 677 calories, much less than the 1,100 at McDonalds, but more than the 495 they thought they were eating—an underestimate by 34 percent. So by this measure (the percent by which they underestimated their caloric consumption), Subway customers were even more misinformed than the McDonald's customers.

Wansink attributes this odd result to Subway's "halo effect," and he finds that this effect is quite widespread. People who are given low-fat foods tend to eat more of them. Often the increase in the overall volume of eating means that, on balance, they are gaining weight, not losing it. For example, low-fat granola has only 10 percent fewer calories than regular granola. Those who get low-fat granola often feel free to eat a lot of it—more than enough to make up the difference in calories.

Wansink found a similar halo effect in a study involving the consequences of giving people a free glass of wine. In a cafeteria one night, half the diners received wine that was said to be from California; the other half received wine said to be from North Dakota. In fact, the wine was identical cheap California wine. (As far as we know, there is no such thing as North Dakota wine, at least wine made with grapes. We hear there is a so-called wine from North Dakota made with rhubarb, but with respect, we are reluctant to call such a beverage wine.) Almost all the diners drank all of their free glass of wine. What was surprising was that those who thought that they had been given California wine ate much more food and stayed much longer. "Exact same meals, exact same wine"—but once people were given a free glass of California wine, they decided that the meal "was going to be good," and they ate an extra amount.

With an understanding of the role of hidden persuaders, how does Wansink propose to help people to lose weight? His organizing idea is that "the best diet is the one you don't know you're on." He wants people to diet mindlessly—to eat smaller amounts fairly automatically. If you avoid stocking up at the grocery store, you will almost certainly lose weight. A more formal approach is to adopt three simple, easily memorized rules that will lead you to consume 100 fewer calories each day (which can turn into as much as a twenty- to thirty-pound loss in a year). The advantage of such rules is that they can develop into habits and thus be applied without continued thinking. Wansink also points to the potential use of "food tradeoffs," as in the idea that I will have a candy bar only if I am playing tennis today, or have dessert only if I don't snack in the morning.

II.

Wansink can be read either as a diet adviser or as an analyst of decision and choice. As a diet adviser, he is sensible but hardly earth-shattering. His suggestions should help people who want to lose ten or twenty pounds; as he notes, his ideas aren't likely to do a lot for people who need to lose much more. Wansink is much more interesting if his clever studies of food consumption are used as a way of gaining insight into everyday decision-making in many domains. His key lesson is that largely invisible features of the context in which we make choices often move our decisions in one direction or another. In deciding what to eat, we are influenced by factors that we believe to be irrelevant and in fact barely observe. If the point holds for eating, it should hold for many other decisions as well, including those that involve health, safety, friendship, finances, and even romance.

But why do we often keep eating even when we are not hungry? Wansink rightly starts with the observation that "stomachs cannot count." He also stresses that the signals we receive from our stomach that we are full come with a lag of at least twenty minutes. So fast eaters can consume a lot of food before their brain receives the message from the stomach announcing "no more room." But, we might wonder, why are human beings wired this way? We usually feel pain immediately; why does it take us the length of a sitcom to realize we have stuffed ourselves on potato chips and don't feel so good?

A simple evolutionary account provides some clues. For most of human history, the simple rule "if food is present, you should eat it" was probably a good one. Learning to monitor how much we eat, in order to avoid becoming obese, was something most human beings did not have to worry much about, and a little extra padding might come in handy if the larder became bare. In a famine, bet on Jack Sprat's wife to outlive him.

These ancient instincts can be strongly reinforced by cultural norms. What is put in front of you provides a signal; it suggests what you should eat. When the plate is large and packed, it conveys information about what is taken to be the ordinary or appropriate meal—and so people will eat a lot. When a plate is small, or when it has a small portion, it also conveys such information—and so people will eat much less. The conclusion is that social contexts offer a range of subtle, sometimes deliberate, sometimes inadvertent signals, by which people are influenced even if they are unaware of that fact. And this conclusion extends well beyond eating.

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Consider an area that seems far afield: the appropriate design of savings plans. In most workplaces, eligible employees receive a notification and are told, "If you want to join the plan, fill out these forms." If employees do nothing, they are not enrolled. But an increasing number of firms use what is called "automatic enrollment." Under automatic enrollment, eligible employees are told, "you are now eligible to join the plan, and unless you fill in the enclosed form you will be enrolled." The choice of automatic enrollment has a large impact. Employees are much more likely to join the savings plan under automatic enrollment, and they join sooner as well.

Social scientists, above all economists, are often puzzled to find that the default option makes such a difference. After all, people can easily select the plan that they prefer. If they want to save money, they can join the relevant plan and opt in; if they don't, they can easily opt out of automatic enrollment. Filling out the form takes just a few minutes. Why does the default have such an impact? Two reasons are important. First, as illustrated by many of Wansink's experiments, people

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have a strong tendency just to "go with the flow." Call it the "yeah, whatever" heuristic. This tendency creates enormous inertia. People who enroll in the plan almost never drop out, but those who fail to sign up when first given the opportunity to do so can take years to get around to it, even in firms in which the employer is providing a strong monetary incentive to join via a company match.

But failing to join is not just a product of inertia. Another reason is that the chosen default conveys what at least has the appearance of information: it provides a strong signal. If your employer automatically defaults you into a savings plan, you might think that a sensible person has decided that the plan is actually in your interest, and that you should stick with it. Defaults matter because people are often mindless choosers, and not just in what they eat.

Return in this light to Wansink's finding that social influences have a large impact on food intake. One reason is that the behavior of others conveys information about what it is reasonable to do. If you are in a group of people who are eating a great deal, you have reason to believe that the food is good and that it makes sense to eat a lot of it. But peer pressure is also important. If you find yourself in a group of people who are eating only modest amounts, perhaps group members will think ill of you if you eat a lot. To the extent that light eaters consume more in heavy-eating groups and heavy eaters eat less in light-eating groups, information and peer pressure are the principal reasons. Social influences have a powerful influence in many domains; they greatly affect decisions about how much to drink, whether to stay in school, to bring lawsuits, to take precautions against natural disasters, to support a particular political campaign, to make charitable contributions, and to commit crimes.

In sum, many of Wansink's findings are best explained as a product of the cues subtly or inadvertently conveyed by one or another feature of the context. If a restaurant says that it is giving you "North Dakota wine," you have a signal of the quality of the restaurant, and that signal may greatly affect your judgment about the food. If you are eating low-calorie granola, it is not exactly senseless to think that large portions will not be particularly fattening. If Jell-O is labeled "strawberry," and is also red, many people will taste it as strawberry Jell-O even if it is lemon, especially because strawberry Jell-O does not taste much different from lemon Jell-O. Very few of us are always willing and able to make fine-grained decisions about how much to eat or about the nutritional value of what we are eating. Instead, we rely on contextual cues. Much of the time, it is sensible to use those cues. The problem is that Wansink, advertisers, restaurants, and other savvy people can manufacture cues to manipulate us in their preferred directions.

But there is some good news here. As Wansink shows, awareness of our vulnerability to manipulation can provide a degree of inoculation against it. If we want to lose weight, we can insist on small portions, split a main course with our dining partner, aim to eat less than our friends at social occasions, and feel bemused, rather than seduced, by attractively named foods or unnecessarily large portions. If we want to save for our retirements, we can take steps, at least once a year, to see whether it might make sense to put more money into savings plans, or, better yet, sign up for a plan that increases our contributions automatically. To improve our health, we might commit to exercising three times a week at a specific date. But the opportunities go well beyond self-help. In a brief but intriguing discussion, Wansink explores the role of "nutritional gatekeepers"—those in the family who select the meals and "have a huge day-by-day influence on their family's nutrition." It turns out that on average, gatekeepers control no less than 72 percent of what their families eat. Wansink contends that gatekeepers can play a large role in nudging their families toward more nutritious and less fattening diets, in part through choosing variety, in part through clever "marketing" to spouses and children, in part through using small serving sizes.

Many other private and public institutions operate as "decision gatekeepers," or what might be better called decision architects, nudging people in particular directions. Restaurants are an obvious example, but the same point holds for hospitals, schools, and computer companies, which offer default packages of various sorts, imposing powerful contextual influences that move people in their preferred directions. Employers are decision architects, too, offering initial packages including one or another combination of take-home wages, savings plans, vacation time, health care, parking privileges, and more. If Wansink is right, these influences will sometimes be simultaneously invisible and strong.

The same point holds for government programs involving Social Security, prescription drugs, discrimination, health care, poverty relief, the environment, and much more. Many of these programs ask citizens to make choices while also offering confusing, distressing, or bad signals. The Medicare Plan D prescription-drug plan could have been much improved with a better understanding of how people choose; many seniors have been overwhelmed by the wide range of options and the sheer complexity of the decisions they are being asked to make. If changes were made to help seniors select the plan that best suits their preferences and drug requirements, then the value of the program to the participants would increase without raising the costs to the government or the insurers.

Armed with an awareness of the power of contextual cues, many people have been exploring new forms of paternalism, sometimes called "weak" or "thin" or (our preferred term) "libertarian." The central idea behind libertarian paternalism is that it is often possible for decision architects to steer people toward better decisions (as judged by the decision-makers themselves, not the architects) without restricting freedom of choice. Automatic enrollment is a good example. The plan designer has to choose something as the default, either opt-in or opt-out. Many more people join under opt-out, and only a tiny number of people quit the plan after having been automatically enrolled, which implies that most were content with the suggestion.

Wansink's own work suggests a nice possibility for libertarian paternalism in the domain of food consumption: public cafeterias, serving children or even adults, could easily enlist contextual cues to lead people to select meals that are both less fattening and more nutritious. If displaying the fruit more prominently than the desserts in a school cafeteria line produces healthier people, isn't that a good outcome? And such measures are far less intrusive than more coercive actions, such as flat bans on junk food from cafeterias.

To those who object to the effort to enlist such cues, Wansink's answer is powerful: such cues are always present anyway, and the real question is their effects. For would-be dieters and gatekeepers, this point offers a clear warning, but it also signals an opportunity, in the form of promising approaches that work by implementing, rather than blocking, people's reflective judgments. If Wansink is right, the same opportunity can be found in many other domains as well. And even in his favored domain, gatekeepers can do more to improve the survival rates of the fattest members of our society, and make all of us a bit more fit. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Audacities

What I want to share with the group this morning is that I am in the fourth or fifth stage of working through my feelings about Barack Obama. In the beginning, I was exhilarated by the appearance of somebody to challenge, and torment, Her Royal Highness, whose dazzling intergalactic celebrity blinds many people to the fact that she may be the most plodding and expedient politician in America. I was troubled by the extent of Obama's own reliance on the machinery of celebrity, and wondered how it was that in his few years in the Senate he found time to write a big book but almost no legislation. (The Hart building is not Yaddo.) But he was plainly a formidable individual, a living mind. And I confess that I plan to be moved to tears on the day that I vote for a black man for the presidency of this stained and stirring country. I was historically titillated even by his middle name, and resented the mildly ugly whispers of Clinton's supporters that a man called Hussein cannot get elected. Where is their faith in America? Anyway, Clinton is the one who, in her long march through the institutions, market-tested every one of her own names.

So I started paying attention, and reading the books, and watching the tapes. I wanted to be very glad. But skepticism is sedulously arriving, like daylight savings time. For a start, I hold Obama's suavity against him. (He is the Billy Eckstine of American politics.) Since I am myself not unsuave, I know how much it accomplishes with how little. Charm is not a political virtue. Eloquence is another matter: Obama's deployment of the language is downright musical in this rhetorically impoverished age. Hillary Clinton's English is the diction of communiqués. But his lyricism is too smooth, too swift, too immune to anxiety or surprise. He is not only thoughtful, he is pre-thoughtful. This is not an era of easy questions, but Obama makes them all look easy. Or worse, he finds their complexity toasty, an occasion for the display of his talent for suasion. In this respect he reminds me not so much of Bill Clinton, whose facility was at least riddled with the particulars of policy, but of Mario Cuomo. Maybe Obama is the new Cuomo, but without the infirm will.

Obama dislikes polarization. I like it. I think it is one of the marks of an engaged citizenry. Obviously it can also become a kind of democratic decadence; but often polarization is simply your name for my refusal to assent to your opinion. I do not expect Obama, for the sake of putting an end to polarization, to support a surge or a tax cut. His failure to do so is an expression of principle, which is always sharp. As an antidote to polarization, he seems to be proposing what used to be called, when Bill Clinton did it so well, triangulation: he is running another end-of-ideology campaign. The problem is that he has not yet justified his end-of-ideology ideology with any real wonkery. Obama is perfectly correct to deplore the effects of doctrinal purity on government, but then he must illustrate his more dialectical understanding with the details of some significant neither-right-nor-left plans and programs. Otherwise it is just uplift.

Obama is also reviving another old Clinton homily, the one against "cynicism." Hillary Clinton used to preach this one often in her politics-of-meaning days. In the Clintons' view, their critics were not only wrong, they were also bad. "Cynicism" is not an argument, it is an aspersion. Its subject is not ideas but motives. Yet it is entirely possible to have the right ideas and the wrong motives, and the wrong ideas and the right motives. The conservative antipathy to government, which is one of Obama's illustrations of contemporary cynicism, is not at all cynical, even if it is false and dangerous. Moreover, I do not see how America can suffer from polarization and cynicism at the same time. Polarization represents an intensity of involvement, a hyperengagement. Whatever else George W. Bush has done, he has politicized America.

And then there is Obama's decision to run on his life—or, as we prefer to say, on his journey. Where is the American without his or her journey? The metaphor of travel is facilitated, I suppose, by technology that promises to abolish space and time (remember "where do you want to go today?"), but mainly it is a means of self-dramatization, of exoticizing even the most banal existence. Obama's books are both autobiographies. Two autobiographies! Whatever his vision of America, and I have no doubt about its fundamental decency, he has been mainly recommending *himself*. More specifically, Obama has been promoting the multiplicity of his origins as a qualification for leadership. This strikes me as little more than identity politics, but with a cunning refinement: instead of being representative of one thing, he is representative of all things. He is typical of everybody, the most racinated American of all. In America, you can be heroic for being typical. But I do not see how your grandfather can make you a hero. And there is something unsavory about the new rage for genealogy: insofar as it aims to supply a biological foundation for identity, it is race science for a pluralist society. I am less interested in Obama's roots than in his branches. The genealogy of a democrat is as irrelevant to a liberal order as the genealogy of an aristocrat. The formative influences are much less important than what they formed. And it is narcissism to vote for a candidate because he is like yourself, or one of your own. I would not vote for a hero of the Jewish partisans from my mother's own town if he were not obsessed with the injustices of the health care system in this country.

But what in health care plan is all a candidate has? Until the fall of the Soviet Union, I voted in general elections on foreign policy grounds. There was an enemy to fear and to fight. Then, for a bizarrely lucky decade, I permitted myself a fuller calculation at the polls. Now I am a bit of a security simpleton again. Obama's opposition to the Iraq war seems to have been principled, and somewhat prescient. But the foreign policy inclinations presented by the candidate are vague and platitudinous and sanguine about the reasonableness of the world. The ghost of Cyrus Vance seems to be consulting for the campaign. So I continue to regard the phenom with some misgivings. Nobody ever charmed anybody out of a nuclear weapon.

Leon Wieseltier

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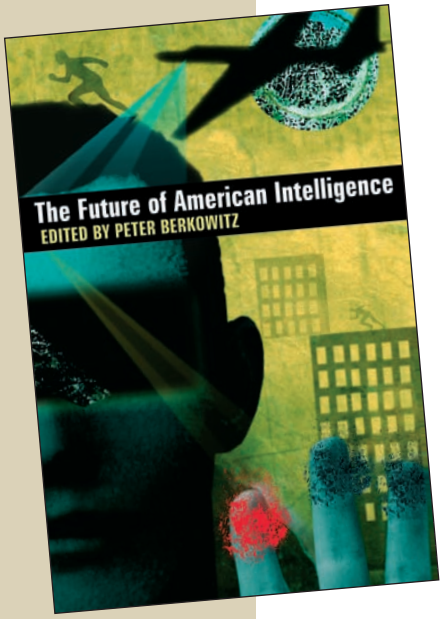

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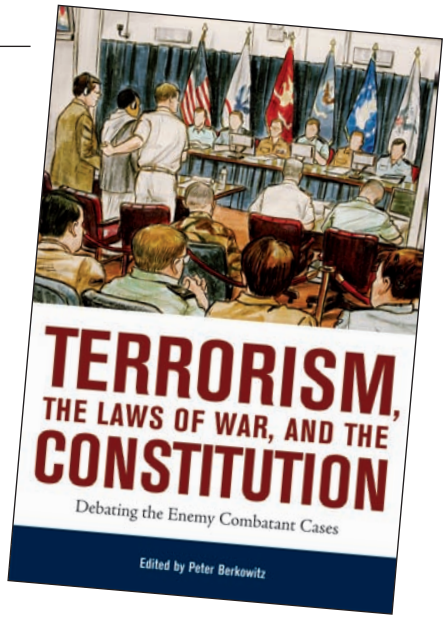

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